ASPHODEL

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

In Three Volumes

VOL. II.

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JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET

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ASPHODEL.

CHAPTER I.

"YEVE ME MY DETH, OR THAT I HAVE A SHAME."

SIR VERNON LAWFORD was sitting alone in his study on the morning after the visit to Goring Abbey, when the door opened suddenly with a sharp jerk, and his younger daughter stood before him. The very manner in which the door opened told him, before he looked up from his desk, that the intruder was Daphne, and not the always welcome Madoline.

He looked at his daughter with cold severe eyes, as at a person who had no right to be there.

Ever since she could remember, Daphne had feared her father much more than she loved him; but never had he seemed to her so awful a being as he appeared this morning in his own room, surrounded by all the symbols of power—the bronze bust of Cicero looking down at him from the bookcase; his despatch-box open at his side, bristling with pen-knives and paper-knives, and stern official stationery; his ponderous silver inkstand, presented by the Warwickshire yeomanry in acknowledgment of his merits as colonel; his russia-leather bound dictionaries and directories, and brazen letter-weighing machine—and all the pomp and circumstance of his business life about him.

"Well, Daphne, what do you want?" he asked, looking at her without a ray of sympathetic feeling in his handsome gray eyes.

"If you please, papa," she faltered, blushing deeply under that severe gaze, and pleating up the edge of her lawn-tennis pinafore in supreme nervousness, "I don't think I'm really finished."

"Finished!" he exclaimed, looking at her as

if he thought she was an idiot. "Finished what? You never finish anything, or begin anything either, so far as I can hear, that is worth doing."

"My education, I mean, papa," she said, looking at him with eyes so lovely in hue and expression, so piteous in their timid pleading, that they ought to have touched him. "I know you sent me to Madame Tolmache to be finished, and that she was very expensive; but I'm afraid I came away horribly ignorant; and I begin to feel that a year or two more of schooling would be of very great value to me. I am older now, don't you know, papa; and I should try more earnestly to improve myself. Indeed, indeed, papa, I would work very hard this time," urged Daphne, remorsefully remembering how little she had worked in the past. "I don't care where you send me: to Asnières, or to Germany, or anywhere: so that I could only go on with my education."

"Go on with it at home," answered Sir Vernon contemptuously. "You can read, and write, and spell, I suppose. Yes; I have some of your letters

asking me for different things in those pigeon-holes. Any woman who can do as much as that can improve herself. There are books enough on those shelves"—with a glance at his classical and correct collection—"to make you wiser than any woman need be. But as for this freak of wanting to go back to school——"

"It is no freak, papa. It is my most earnest desire. I feel it would be better—for all of us."

She had changed from red to white by this time, and stood before her father like a culprit, downcast and deadly pale.

"It would not be better for me who would have to pay the bills. I have paid a pretty penny already for your education; and you may suppose how vastly agreeable it is to me to hear your frank confession of ignorance."

"It is best for me to tell the truth, papa. Do not deny me this favour. It is the first great thing I have ever asked of you."

"It is a very foolish thing, and I should be a fool if I humoured your caprice."

She gave a little cry of mental pain.

"How can I convince you that it is no caprice?" she asked despairingly. "I was lying awake all last night thinking about it. I am most thoroughly in earnest, papa."

"You were thoroughly in earnest about your boat; and now you are tired of it. You were intensely anxious to come home; and now you are tired of home. You are a creature of whims and fancies."

"No, I am not tired of my boat," she cried passionately. "I love it with all my heart, and the dear river, and this place, and Madoline—and you—if you would only let me love you. Father," she said in a low tremulous voice, coming hurriedly to her father and kneeling at his feet, with clasped hands uplifted beseechingly, "there are times in a woman's life when a light shines suddenly upon her showing her where her duty lies. I believe that it is my duty to go back to school, somewhere, in France, or Germany, where I can get on with my education and grow serious and useful, as a woman ought to be. It will be very hard, it will be parting from all I love best in

the world, but I feel and know that it is my duty. Let me go, dear father. The outlay of a few pounds cannot affect you."

"Can it not? That shows how little you know of the world. When a man is overweighted as I am in this place, living up to every sixpence of his income, and so fettered that he cannot realise an acre of his estate, every hundred he has to spend is of moment. Your education has been a costly business already; and I distinctly refuse to spend another sixpence on it. If you have not profited by my outlay, so much the worse for you. Get up, child." She was still on her knees, looking at him in blank despair. "This melodramatic fooling is the very last thing to succeed with a man of my stamp. I detest heroics."

"Very well, father," she answered in a subdued tone, strangling her sobs and standing straight and tall before him. "I hope if you should ever have cause to blame me for anything in the future you will remember this refusal to-day."

"I shall blame you if you deserve blame, you may be sure of that," he answered harshly.

"And never praise me when I deserve praise, and never love me, or sympathise with me, or be a father to me—except in name."

"Precisely," he said, looking downward with a gloomy brow. "Except in name. And now be kind enough to leave me. I have a good many letters to write."

Daphne obeyed without a word. When she was in the corridor outside, and had shut the door behind her, she stopped for a few moments leaning against the wall, looking straight before her with a countenance of inexpressible sadness.

"It was the only thing I could do," she murmured with a heavy sigh.

Sir Vernon told his elder daughter that afternoon of Daphne's absurd fancy about going back to school.

"Did you ever hear of such a mass of inconsistency?" he exclaimed angrily. "After worrying you continually with appealing letters to be brought home, she is tired of us all and wants to be off again in less than six months."

"It is strange, papa, especially in one who is

so thoroughly sweet and loving," said Madoline thoughtfully. "Do you know I'm afraid it must be my fault."

"In what way?"

"I have been urging her to continue her education; and perhaps I may have inadvertently given her the idea that she ought to go back to school."

"That is simply to suppose her an idiot, and unable to comprehend plain English," retorted Sir Vernon testily. "You are always making excuses for her. Hark!" he cried, as a bright girlish laugh came ringing across the summer air. "There she is, playing tennis with Turchill. Would you suppose that two hours ago she was kneeling to me like a tragedy queen, her eyes streaming with tears, entreating to be sent back to school?"

"I'll reason her out of her fancy, dear father. She always gives way to me when I wish it."

"I am glad she has just sense enough to understand your superiority."

"Dearest father, if you would be a little more

affectionate to her—in your manner, I mean—I believe she would be a great deal happier."

Another ringing laugh from Daphne.

"She is monstrously unhappy, is she not?" exclaimed Sir Vernon. "My dear Lina, that girl is a born *comédienne*. She will always be acting tragedy or comedy all her life through. This morning it was tragedy; this afternoon it is comedy. Do not let yourself be duped by her."

"Believe me, papa, you misjudge her!"

"I hope it may be so."

"Daphne, what is this fancy of yours about going back to school?" asked Madoline, when she and her sister were sitting in the conservatory that evening in the sultry summer dusk, while Sir Vernon and the two young men were talking politics over their claret. "I was quite grieved to hear of it, believing, as I did, that you were very happy at home."

"Why, so I am—intensely happy—with you, darling," answered Daphne, taking her sister's hand, and twisting the old-fashioned brilliant

hoops, which Lina had inherited from her grandmother, round and round upon the slender finger. "So I am, dear, utterly happy. But happiness is not the be-all and end-all of this life, is it, Lina? The Rector is continually telling us that it isn't, in those prosy port-winey old sermons of his; but if he were only candid about his feelings he would say that the end and aim of this life was dinner. I don't suppose I was born only to be happy, was I, Lina? We unfortunate mortals are supposed to belong to the silkworm rather than to the butterfly species, and to work out a career of usefulness in the grub and worm stages, before we earn the right to flutter feebly for a little while as elderly moths. Youth, from a Christian point of view, is meant for work, and self-abnegation, and duty, and all that kind of thing; isn't it, Lina?"

"Every stage of life has its obligations, dearest; but your duties are very easy ones," answered Madoline gently. "You have only to be respectful and obedient to your father, and to do as much good as you can to those who

need your kindness, and to be grateful to God for the many good gifts He has lavished upon you."

"Yes; I suppose that upon the whole I am a very fortunate young person, although I am a pauper," said Daphne sententiously. "I have youth, and the use of all my faculties, and a ridiculously good constitution. I know I can walk knee-deep in wet grass and never catch cold, and drink quarts of iced water when I am in a fever of heat, and do all manner of things that people consider tantamount to suicide, and be none the worse for my folly. And then I have a fine house to live in; though I have the sense that I am nobody in it; and I have a very aristocratic father —to look at. Yes, Madoline, I have all these things, and they are of no account to me; but I have your love, and that is worth them all a hundred times over."

The sisters sat with clasped hands, Madoline touched by the wayward girl's affection. The moon was shining above the deodaras; the last of the nightingales was singing amidst the darkness of the shrubbery.

"Why do you want to go back to school, Daphne?" asked Lina again, coaxingly.

"I don't want to go."

"But this morning you were begging papa to send you back."

"Yes; I had an idea that I ought to improve myself—this morning. But as papa refused to grant my request in a very decisive manner, I have put the notion out of my head. I thought that another year with Madame Tolmache might have improved my French, and reconciled me to the necessity for a subjunctive mood, which I never could see while I was at Asnières; or that a twelvemonth in Germany might have enabled me to distinguish the verbs that require the dative case after them, from the verbs that are satisfied with the accusative, which at present is a thing utterly beyond me. But papa says no, and, as I am much fonder of boating and tennis and billiards than of study, I am not going to find fault with papa's decision."

This was all said so lightly, with so much of the natural recklessness of a high-spirited girl who

has never had a secret in her life, that Madoline had not a moment's doubt of her sister's candour. Yet there was a hardness in Daphne's tone to-night that grieved her.

"Who is fond of billiards?" asked Gerald's lazy tones, a little way above them, and, looking up, they saw him leaning with folded arms upon the broad marble balustrade. "Are you coming up to the drawing-room to give us some music, or are we coming down to the billiard-room to play a match with you?" he inquired.

"Whichever my father likes," answered Madoline.

"Sir Vernon will not play this evening. He has gone to his room to read the evening papers. I think he has not forgiven Turchill for the series of flukes by which he won that game last night. Edgar and I will have a clear stage and no favour this evening, and we mean to give you two young ladies a tremendous licking."

"You will have an easy victim in me," said Madoline. "I have not played half-a-dozen times since you left home."

"Devotion surpassing Penelope's. And Daphne,

I suppose, is still a tyro at the game. We must give you seventy-five out of a hundred."

"You are vastly condescending," exclaimed Daphne, drawing herself up. "You will give me nothing! I don't care how ignominiously I am beaten; but I will not be treated like a baby."

"*Und etwas schnïppish doch zugleich,*" quoted Mr. Goring, smiling to himself in the darkness.

And now Edgar Turchill came out of the drawing-room, and the two young men went down the shallow flight of steps to the conservatory, where Madoline and her sister were still seated in their wicker-work chairs in front of the open door, through which the moonlit garden looked so fair a scene of silent peace.

"Daphne is quite right to reject your humiliating concessions," said Edgar. "She and I will play against you and Madoline, and beat you."

"Easily done, my worthy Saxon," answered Gerald, who was apt to make light of his friend's ancient lineage, in a good-natured easy-going way. "I have never given more than a fraction of my mind to billiards."

"Then you must be a deuced bad player," said Edgar bluntly.

They all went down into the billiard-room, where Daphne's eyes sparkled with unaccustomed fire in the lamplight, as if the mere notion of the coming contest had fevered her excitable brain. Turchill, who was thoroughly earnest in his amusements, took off his coat with the air of a man who meant business. Gerald Goring slipped out of his as if he were going to lie down for an after-dinner nap on one of the broad morocco-covered divans.

And now began the fight. Gerald and Madoline were obviously nowhere, from the very beginning. Daphne had a firmness of wrist, a hawklike keenness of eye, an audacity of purpose that accomplished miracles. The more difficult the position the better her stroke. Her boldness conquered where a more cautious player must have failed. She sent her adversaries' ball rattling into the pockets with a dash that even stimulated Gerald Goring to applaud his antagonist. And while she swelled the score by the most startling strokes, Edgar crept quietly after her with his judicious

and careful play—doing wonderful things with his arms behind his back, in the easiest manner.

"I throw up the sponge," cried Gerald, after struggling feebly against his fate. "Lina, dearest, forgive me for my candour, but you are playing almost as wretchedly as I. We are both out of it. You two young gladiators had better finish the game by playing against each other up to a hundred, while Lina and I look on and applaud you. I like to see youth energetic, even if its energies are misdirected."

He seated himself languidly on the divan which commanded the best view of the table. Lina sat by his side, her white hands moving with an almost rhythmical regularity as she knitted a soft woollen comforter for one of her numerous pensioners.

"My busy Penelope, don't you think you might rest from your labours now that Ulysses is safe at home, and the suitors are all put to flight?" asked Gerald, looking admiringly at the industrious hands. "You have no idea how horribly idle you make me feel."

"I think idleness is the privilege of your sex,

Gerald; but it would be the penalty of ours. I am wretched without some kind of work."

"Another case of misdirected energy," sighed Gerald, throwing himself lazily back against the India-matting dado, and clasping his hands above his head, as he watched the antagonists.

Daphne was playing as if her life depended on her victory. Her slim figure was braced like a young athlete's, every muscle of the round white arm defined under her muslin sleeve—the bare supple wrist and delicate hand looking as strong as steel. She moved round the table with the swift lightness of some wild thing of the woods—graceful, shy, untamable, half-savage, yet wholly beautiful.

Edgar Turchill went on all the while in his businesslike way, playing with either hand, and behaving just as coolly as if he had been playing against Sir Vernon. Yet every now and then, when it was Daphne's turn to play, he fell into a dreamy contemplative mood, and stood on one side watching her as if she were something too wonderful to be quite human.

"There's a stroke!" he cried, as she left him tight under the cushion, with nothing to play for. "I taught her. Oughtn't I to be proud of such a pupil?"

"You taught me sculling, and lawn-tennis, and billiards," said Daphne, considering what she should do next. "All I have ever learnt worth knowing."

"Daphne!" murmured Madoline, looking up reproachfully from her ivory needles.

"I say it advisedly," argued Daphne, making another score. "Edgar, I am not at all sure you are marking honestly. Mr. Goring would mark for us if he were not too lazy."

"Not too lazy," murmured Gerald languidly, "but too delightfully occupied in watching you. I would not spoil my pleasure by mixing it with business for the world."

"What is the use of book-learning?" continued Daphne, going on with her argument. "I maintain that Edgar has taught me all I know worth knowing, for he has taught me how to be happy. I adore the river; I doat upon billiards; and next

best after billiards I like lawn-tennis. Do you suppose I shall ever be happier for having learnt French grammar, or the Rule of Three?"

"Daphne, you are the most inconsistent person I ever met with," said Madoline, almost angry. "Only this morning you wanted to go back to school to finish your education."

"Did she?" asked Gerald, suddenly attentive.

"That was all nonsense," exclaimed Daphne, colouring violently.

Mr. Turchill laughed heartily at the idea.

"Go back to school!" he exclaimed. "What, after having tasted liberty, and learnt to shoot Stratford bridge, and to beat her master at billiards —for that last cannon makes the hundred, Daphne! Back to school, indeed! What a little humbug you must be to talk of such a thing!"

"Yes," answered Daphne coolly, as she put away her cue, and came quietly round to her sister's side; "I am a little bit of a humbug. I think I try to humbug myself sometimes. I persuaded myself this morning that I really thirsted for knowledge; but my father contrived to quench

that righteous thirst with a very big dose of cold water—so henceforth I renounce all attempts to improve myself."

The clock on the chimney-piece struck the half-hour after ten.

"I ordered my dog-cart for ten," said Gerald; "I hope we have not transgressed, Lina, by staying so late?"

"I'm not going till eleven, unless Miss Lawford sends me away," said Turchill. "Eleven is the mystic hour at which Sir Vernon usually tells me to go about my business. I know the ways and manners of the house better than a wretched wanderer like you, whose last idea of time is derived from some wretched old Dalecarlian town-clock."

"We had better go back to the drawing-room," suggested Madoline. "My father has finished his letters by this time, I daresay."

"Then good-night everybody," said Daphne. "I'm going into the garden to cool myself after that fearful struggle, and then to bed."

She ran off through the conservatory while

Gerald was opening the opposite door for Madoline to go up to the drawing-room by the indoor staircase.

Daphne stopped to draw breath on the moonlit terrace.

"How ridiculously I have been gabbling!" she said to herself, with her hands clasping her burning forehead. "Why can't I hold my tongue? I am detestable to myself and everybody."

"Daphne," said someone close at her side, in a tone of friendliest concern, "I'm afraid you're really tired."

It was Edgar Turchill, who had followed her through the conservatory.

"Tired! Not at all. I would play against you again to-night—and beat you—if it were not too late."

"But I am sure you are tired; there is a something in your voice—strained, unnatural. Have you been vexed to-day? My poor little Daphne," he went on tenderly, taking her hand, "something has gone wrong with you, I am sure. Has your aunt been lecturing?"

"No. My father was unkind to me this morning; and I was weak enough to take his unkindness to heart; which I ought not to have done, being so well broken in to it."

"And did you really and truly wish to go back to school?"

"I really and truly felt that I was an ignoramus, and that I had better go on with my education while I was young enough to learn."

"Daphne, if you had all the knowledge of all the girls in Girton screwed into that little golden head of yours, you wouldn't be one whit more charming than you are now."

"I daresay the effect would be the other way; but I might be a great deal more useful. I might teach in a poor school, or nurse the sick, or do something in some way to help my fellow-creatures. But sculling, and billiard-playing, and lawn-tennis —isn't it a horridly empty life?"

"If there were not birds and butterflies, and many bright useless things, this world wouldn't be half so beautiful as it is, Daphne."

"Oh, now you are dropping into poetry, like

Mr. Wegg, and I must go to bed," she retorted, with good-humoured petulance, cheered by his kindness. "Good-night, Edgar. You are always good to me. I shall always like you," she said gently.

"Always like me. Yes, I hope so, Daphne. And do you still think that you would rather have had me than Gerald Goring for your brother?"

"Ten thousand times."

"Yet he is a thoroughly amiable fellow, kind to everyone, generous to a fault."

"A man with a million of money can't be generous," answered Daphne; "he can never give anything that he wants for himself. Generosity means self-sacrifice, doesn't it? It was generous of you to leave Hawksyard at six in the morning in order to teach me to scull."

"I would do a great deal more than that to please you, and count it no sacrifice," said Edgar gravely.

"I am sure you would," answered Daphne, with easy frankness.

She was so thoroughly convinced that he would never leave off caring for Madoline, and would go

down to his grave fondly faithful to his first misplaced affection, that no word or tone or look of his, however significant, suggested to her any other feeling on his part than an honest brotherly regard for herself.

"Tell me what you think of Goring, now that you have had time to form an opinion about him."

"I think that he is devoted to Lina, and that is all I want to know about him," answered Daphne decisively.

"And do you think him worthy of her?"

"Oh, that is a wide question. There was never a man living except King Arthur that I should think absolutely worthy of my sister Madoline; but as he is lying in Glastonbury Abbey, I think Mr. Goring will do as well as anyone else. I hope Lina will govern him, for his own sake as well as hers."

"You think him weak, then?"

"I think him self-indulgent; and a self-indulgent man is always a weak man, isn't he? Look at Gladstone now, a man of surpassing energy, of illimitable industry, a man who will eat a snack of

cold beef and drink a glass of cold water for his luncheon, at his desk, in the midst of his work, anyhow. Mr. Lampton, the new member who went up to see him, gave us a sketch of him in his study, living so simply and working so hard, so thoroughly homely and unaffected."

"Daphne, I thought you were a hardened little Tory!"

"So I am; but I can admire the individual though I may detest his politics. That is the kind of man I should like Lina to marry: a man without a selfish thought, a man made of iron."

"Don't you think a wife might hurt herself now and then against the rough edges of the iron? Those unselfish men are apt to demand a good deal of self-sacrifice from others."

"And you think Lina was meant to sit in a drawing-room all her life, among hot-house flowers. Well, I believe she will be very happy at Goring Abbey. She likes a quiet domestic life, and to live among the people she loves. And Mr. Goring's selfishness will hardly trouble her. She has had such splendid training with papa."

"Daphne, do you think it is quite right to speak of your father in that way?" asked Edgar reproachfully.

He was wounded by her flippant tone, hurt by every evidence of faultiness in one whom he hoped the future would develop into perfect woman and perfect wife.

"Would you like me to be a hypocrite?"

"No, Daphne. But if you can't speak of Sir Vernon as he ought to be spoken of, don't you think it would be better to say nothing at all?"

"For the future I shall be dumb, in deference to Mr. Turchill—and the proprieties. But it was nice to have one friend in the world with whom I could be thoroughly confidential," she added coaxingly.

"Pray be confidential with me."

"I can't, if you once begin to lecture. I have a horror of people who talk to me for my own good. That is Aunt Rhoda's line. She is never tired of preaching to me for my good, and I never feel so utterly bad as I do after one of her preachments. And now I really must say good-night.

Don't forget that you are engaged to dine at the Rectory to-morrow."

"Are not you and Lina going?"

"Yes, and Mr. Goring. It is to be a regular family gathering. Papa is asked, but I cherish a faint hope that he may not feel in the humour for going. I beg your pardon," exclaimed Daphne, making him a ceremonious curtsy. "My honoured parent has been invited, and wherever he is his children must be happy. Is that the kind of thing you like?" she asked, tripping away to the little half-glass door at the other end of the terrace.

Edgar ran after her to open the door for her; but she was fleet as Atalanta, and there was nobody to distract her with golden apples. She shut the door and drew the bolt, just as Edgar reached it, and nodded a smiling good-night to him through the glass. He stopped to see the white frock vanish from the lamp-lit lobby, and then turned away to light a cigarette and take a solitary turn on the terrace before going back to the drawing-room to make his adieux.

It was a spot where a man might love to linger

on such a night as this. The winding river, showing in fitful glimpses between its shadowy willows; the distant woods; the dim lights of the little quiet town; the tall spire rising above the trees; made up a landscape dearer to Edgar Turchill's honest English heart than all the blue mountains and vine-clad valleys of the sunny South. He was a son of the soil, with all his desires and prejudices and affections rooted in the land on which he had been born. "How sweet—how completely lovable she is," he said to himself, meditating over that final cigarette, "and how thoroughly she trusts me! Her mind is as clear as a rivulet, through which one can count every pebble and every grain of golden sand."

CHAPTER II.

"AND TO THE DINNER FASTE THEY HEM SPEDDE."

Mr. MacCloskie's suggestions for new hot-houses at Goring Abbey were on so large a scale as to necessitate a good deal of consultation with architect and builder before the new constructions and alterations of existing structures were put in hand. The head gardener at South Hill had tried his hardest to secure the whole organisation and direction of the work for himself, and to have large powers in the choice of the men who were to carry it out.

"Ye'll not need any architect, Mr. Goring, if ye'll joost let me explain my mind to the builder," said this modest Caledonian. "Architects know a

deal about the Parthenon, and the Temple of the Winds, and that kind of old-fashioned classical stuff, but there's not one of 'em knows how to plan a good workable hot-house, or to build a flue that won't smoke when the wind's contrairy. Architects are very good for the fronts of club-houses and ceevil-service stores, and that like; but if you trust your new houses to an architect, I'll give odds when they're done there'll be no place for me to put my coals. If you'll just give me free scope——"

"You are very good, Mr. MacCloskie," answered Gerald with velvety softness, "but my father was a thoroughly practical man, and I believe he knew as much of the science of construction as any man living; yet he always employed an architect when he wanted anything built for himself, were it only a dustbin. I'll stick to his lines."

"Very well, sir, you must please yourself. But an orchid-house is a erectical thing to build. The outside of it may be as handsome as St. Peter's at Rome; but your orchids won't thrive unless they like the inside arrangements, and for them ye'll want a practical man."

"I'll get a practical man, Mr. MacCloskie; you may be sure of that," answered Gerald, ineffably calm, though the Scot was looking daggers.

The morning before Mrs. Ferrers's family dinner was devoted to the architect, who came down from London to Goring Abbey, expressly to advise and be instructed. He was entertained at luncheon at the Abbey; and Lina drove over under her aunt's wing to meet him, while Gerald's thoroughbred hack—a horse of such perfect manners that it mattered very little whether his rider had hands or no hands—ambled along the turfy borders of the pleasant country road beside the phaeton.

Daphne had her day all to herself, since, knowing her to be alone at South Hill, Edgar had no excuse for going there; and, as Mr. Turchill argued with himself, a man must give some portion of his life to the dearest old mother and the most picturesque old house in the county. So Edgar, with his fancies flying off and circling about South Hill, contrived to spend a moony day at home, mending his fishing-rods, reviewing his guns, writing a few letters, and going in and out

of his mother's homely old-fashioned morning-room twenty times between breakfast and luncheon.

Mrs. Turchill had been invited to the family dinner at Arden Rectory, and had accepted the invitation, though she was not given to dissipation of any kind, and she and her son found a good deal to say about the coming feast during Edgar's desultory droppings-in.

"I hope you'll like her, mother," said Edgar, stopping, with a gun in one hand and an oily rag in the other, to look dreamily across the moat to the quiet meadows beyond, where the dark red Devon cows contrasted deliciously with the fresh green turf sprinkled with golden buttercups and silvery marguerites.

"Like her!" echoed Mrs. Turchill, lifting her soft blue eyes in mild astonishment from her matronly task of darning one of the best damask table-cloths. "Why she is the sweetest girl I know. I would have given ten years of my life for you to have married her."

This was awkward for Edgar, who had spoken

of Daphne, while Mrs. Turchill thought of Madoline.

"Not with my consent, mother," he said laughing, and reddening as he laughed. "I couldn't have spared a single year. But I wasn't speaking of Madoline just then. I know of old how fond you are of her. I was talking of poor little Daphne, whom you haven't seen since she came from her French school."

"French school!" exclaimed Mrs. Turchill contemptuously. "I hate the idea of those foreign schools, regular Jesuitical places, where they take girls to operas and theatres and give them fine notions," pursued the Saxon matron, whose ideas on the subject were slightly mixed. "Why couldn't Sir Vernon send her to the Misses Tompion, at Leamington? That's a respectable school if you like. Good evangelical principles, separate bed-rooms, and plain English diet. I hope the French school hasn't spoilt Daphne. She was a pretty little girl with bright hair, I remember, but she had rather wild ways. Something too much of a tomboy for my taste."

"She was so young, mother, when you saw her last, not fifteen."

"Well, I suppose French governesses have tamed her down, and that she's pretty stiff and prim by this time," said Mrs. Turchill with chilling indifference.

"No, mother, she is a kind of girl whom no training would ever make conventional. She is thoroughly natural, original even, and doesn't mind what she says."

"That sounds as if she talked slang," said Mrs. Turchill, who, although the kindest of women in her conduct, could be severe of speech on occasion, "and of all things I detest slang in a woman. I hope she is industrious. The idleness of the young women of the present day is a crying sin."

Edgar Turchill seemed hardly to be aware of this last remark. He was polishing the gun-metal industriously with that horrible oily rag which accompanied him everywhere on his muddling mornings at home.

"She's accomplished, I suppose," speculated

Mrs. Turchill—"plays, and sings, and paints on velvet."

"Ye—es; that's to say I'm not sure about the velvet," answered Edgar faintly, not remembering any special artistic performances of Daphne's, except certain attempts on a drawing-block, which had seemed to him too green and too cloudy to lead to much, and which he had never beheld in an advanced stage. "She is awfully fond of reading," he added in rather a spasmodic manner, after an interval of silent thought. "The poetry she knows would astonish you."

"That would be easy," retorted Mrs. Turchill. "My father and mother didn't approve of poetry, and Cowper, Thomson, and Kirke White were the only poets allowed to be read by us girls at old Miss Tompion's—these ladies are nieces of my Miss Tompion, you know, Edgar."

"How can I help knowing it, mother, when you've told me a hundred and fifty times," exclaimed her son, more impatiently than his wont.

"Well, Edgar, my dear, if you're tired of my conversation——"

"No, you dear peppery old party, not a bit. Go on like an old dear as you are. Only I thought you were rather hard upon poor little Daphne just now."

"How can I be hard upon her, when I haven't seen her for the last three years! Dear, dear, what a small place Leamington was in my time," pursued Mrs. Turchill, musing blandly upon the days of her youth; "but it was much more select. None of these rich people from Birmingham; none of these Londoners coming down to hunt; but a very superior class—invalids, elderly people who came to drink the waters, and to consult Doctor Jephson."

"It must have been lively," murmured Edgar, not deeply interested.

"It was not lively, Edgar, but it was select," corrected Mrs. Turchill with dignity, as she paused with her head on one side to admire the neatness of her own work.

She was the kindest and best of mothers, but Edgar felt on this particular occasion that she was rather stupid, and a trifle narrow in her ideas. A

purely rustic life has its disadvantages, and a life which is one long procession of placid prosperous days, knowing little more variety than the change of the seasons, is apt to blunt the edge of the keenest intellect. Mrs. Turchill ought to have been more interested in Daphne, Edgar thought.

"She will be delighted with her when she sees her," he reasoned, comforting himself. "Who can help being charmed with a girl who is so thoroughly charming?"

And then he took up his gun and his rag, and strolled away to another part of the roomy old house, so soberly and thoroughly old fashioned, not with the gimcrack spurious old fashion of to-day, but with the grave ponderous realities of centuries ago—walls four feet thick, deeply recessed windows, massive untrimmed joists, low ceilings, narrow passages, oak wainscoting, inconveniences and shortcomings of all kinds, but the subtle charm of the remote past, the romantic feeling of a house that has many histories, pervading everything. Edgar would not have changed Hawksyard and his three thousand a-year for Goring Abbey and a

million. The house and the land around it—or at any rate the land—had belonged to his race from time immemorial, far back in the dim days of the Heptarchy. Tradition held that the first of the Turchills had been a sokeman who possessed a yard of land on the old feudal tenure, one of his obligations being that he should breed hawks for the king's falconers, and thus the place had come in time to be called Hawksyard, long after the last hawk bred there had flown away to join some wild branch of the honey-buzzard family in the tree-tops of primeval Arden, and the yard of land had swelled into a very respectable manor. Edgar rather liked to believe that the founder of his race had been a sokeman, who had held thirty acres of land from the king at a penny an acre, and had furnished labourers for the royal harvest, and had ridden up and down the field with a wand in his hand to see that his men worked properly. This curious young man was as proud of Turchill the sokeman as of Turchill the high sheriff. If it was a humble origin its humility was of such ancient date that it became distinction. Turchill of the

thirty acres was like Adam, or Paris, or David. In the long line of the Turchills whose bones were lying in the vaults below Hawksyard Church there had been men distinguished in the field, the Church, and the law; men who had fought on sea and land; men who had won power in the State, and used it well, true alike to king and commons. But the ruck of the Turchills had been country squires like Edgar, and Edgar's father; men who farmed their own land and lived upon it, and who had no ambitions and few interests or desires beyond their native soil.

Hawksyard was a real moated grange. The house formed three sides of a quadrangle, with a heavily-buttressed garden wall for the fourth side. The water flowed all round the solid base of the building, a wide deep moat, well stocked with pike and eels, carp and roach. The square inner garden was a prim parterre of the seventeenth century, and there was not a flower grew there more modern than Lord Bacon's day. This was a Turchill fancy. All the novelties of nineteenth-century horticulture might flourish in

the spacious garden on the other side of the moat; but this little bit of ground within the gray old walls was a sacred enclosure, dedicated to the spirit of the past. Here the old yew-trees were clipped into peacocks. Here grew rosemary; lavender; periwinkle, white, purple, and blue; germander; flags; sweet marjoram; primroses; anemones; hyacinths; and the rare fritillaria; double white violets, which bloom in April, and again at Bartholomew-tide; gilliflowers; sweet-brier; and the musk-rose. Here the brazen sun-dial, on its crumbling stone pedestal, reminded the passer-by that no man is always wise. Here soft mosses, like tawny velvet, crept over the gray relics of an abbey that had been destroyed soon after the grange was built—the stone coffin of a mitred abbot; the crossed legs of a knightly crusader, with a headless heraldic dog at his feet. Here was the small circular fish-pond into which the last of the abbots was supposed to have pitched headforemost, and incontinently drowned himself, walking alone at midnight in a holy trance.

Mrs. Turchill was almost as fond as Edgar was of Hawksyard; but her affection took a commonplace turn. She was not to the manner born.

She had come to the grange from a smart nineteenth-century villa, and though she was very proud of the grave old house of which her husband had made her the mistress, her pride was mingled with an idea that Hawksyard was inconvenient, and that its old fashion was a thing to be apologised for and deprecated at every turn. Her chief delight was in keeping her house in order; and her servants were drilled to an almost impossible perfection in every duty appertaining to house-cleaning. Nobody's brasses, or oak floors, or furniture, or family plate, or pewter dinner-service, ever looked so bright as Mrs. Turchill's. Nowhere were windows so spotless; nowhere was linen so exquisitely white, or of such satin-like smoothness. Mrs. Turchill lived for these things. When she was in London, or at the sea-side, she would be miserable on rainy days at the idea that Jane or Mary would leave

the windows open, and that the brass fenders and fire-irons were all going to ruin.

Edgar spent a moony purposeless day, dawdling a good deal in the garden on the other side of the moat, where the long old-fashioned borders were full of tall white lilies and red moss-roses, vivid scarlet geranium, heliotrope and calceolaria, a feast of sweet scents and bright colours. There was a long and wide lawn without a flower bed on it—a level expanse of grass; and on the side opposite the flower border there was a row of good old mulberry and walnut trees; then came a light iron fence, and a stretch of meadow land beyond it. The grounds at Hawksyard made no pretence of being a park. There was not even a shrubbery, only that straight row of old trees, standing up out of the grass, with a gravel walk between them and the fence, across which Edgar used to feed and fondle his cows, or coax the shy brood mares and their foals to social intercourse.

He looked round his domain doubtfully to-day, wondering if it were good enough for Daphne, this poor table-land of a garden, a flat lawn, a long old-

fashioned border crammed with homely flowers, the yew-tree arbour at the end of yonder walk. How poor a thing it seemed after South Hill, with its picturesque timber and extensive view, its broad terrace and sloping lawn, its rich variety of shrubs and conifers!

"It isn't because I am fond of the place that she would care for it," he told himself despondently. "I'm afraid there's nothing romantic or striking about it—except the moat. I'm glad she's so fond of water."

Edgar smoked a cigarette or two under the mulberry-trees, looked at his cows, talked to some of his men, and thus contrived to wear away the afternoon till the clock over the gateway struck five.

"Mother's tea-time. I'll go and have a cup with her," he said to himself.

Going out to dinner was a tremendous piece of business with Mrs. Turchill. She was more serious and solemn about it than a strictly modern lady would feel about going to be married. Even in an instance of this kind, where the dinner was sup-

posed to be entirely unceremonious, a friendly little gathering arranged on the spur of the moment, she was still full of fuss and preparation. She had spent an hour in her bed-chamber before luncheon, arranging and discussing with her maid Deborah what gown she would or would not wear on the occasion; and this discussion involved a taking out and unfolding of all her dinner-gowns, and an offering of divers laces upon divers bodices, to see which went best with which. A review of this kind generally ended by a decision in favour of black velvet, or satin, or silk, or brocade, as the case might be; Mrs. Turchill being much richer in gowns than in opportunities for wearing them.

"I always like myself best in black," she would say, with a glance at the reflection of her somewhat florid complexion in the Chippendale glass.

"You always look the lady in your velvet, mum," Deborah would answer sententiously.

Then after a day of quiet usefulness about her house the worthy matron would collect her energies over a leisurely cup of tea, and perhaps allow her-

self the refreshment of a nap after her tea, before she began the solemn business of the toilet.

The carriage had been ordered for a quarter-past seven, though it was but half an hour's drive to Arden Rectory, and at seven o'clock Mrs. Turchill was seated in the white parlour, in all the dignity of her velvet gown and point-lace cap, her hereditary amethysts, supposed to be second only to those once possessed by George the Third's virtuous consort, and her scarlet and gold Indian shawl. She was a comely matron, with a complexion that had never been damaged by cark or care, gas or late hours: a rosy-faced country-bred dame, with bright blue eyes, white teeth, and plentiful brown hair, in which the silver threads were hardly visible.

Edgar was standing by the open window, just where he had stood in the morning with his gun, sorely perplexed as to the disposal of those fifteen minutes which had to be got through before the most punctual of coachmen would bring the carriage to the door. The London papers were lying unheeded on the table; but Edgar had felt very little

interest of late in the welfare of nations, or even in the last dreadful murder in Whitechapel.

"I hope my cap is right," said Mrs. Turchill anxiously.

"How could it be wrong, mother, when you've Deborah and your looking-glass, and have never been known to dress yourself in a hurry?"

"I dislike doing anything in a hurry, Edgar. It is against my principles. But I never feel sure about the set of my cap. I am afraid Deborah's eye is not quite correct, and a glass is dreadfully deceiving. I wish you'd look, Edgar, if it isn't too much trouble."

This was said reproachfully, as her son was kneeling on the window-seat staring idly down into the moat, as if he wanted to discover the whereabouts of an ancient pike that had evaded him last year.

"My dear mother," he exclaimed, turning himself about to survey her, "to my eye—which may be no better than Deborah's—that lace arrangement which you call a cap appears mathematically exact, as precise as your own straight,

honest mind. There's Dobson with the carriage. Come along, mother."

He led her out, established her comfortably in her own particular seat in the large landau, and seated himself opposite to her with a beaming countenance.

"How happy you look, Edgar!" said Mrs. Turchill, wondering at this unusual radiance. "One would think it were a novelty for you to dine out. Yet I am sure," somewhat plaintively, "you don't very often dine at home."

"The Rectory dinners are not to be despised, mother."

"Mrs. Ferrers is an excellent manager, and does everything very nicely; but as you don't much care what you eat that would hardly make you so elated. I am rather surprised that you care about meeting Madoline and Mr. Goring so often," added Mrs. Turchill, who had not quite forgiven Lina for having refused to marry her son.

That is the worst of making a confidante of a mother. She has an inconveniently long memory.

"I have nothing but kindly feelings for either

of them," answered Edgar. "Don't you know the old song, mother—'Shall I, wasting in despair, die because a woman's fair?' I don't look much like wasting in despair, do I, old lady?"

"I should be very sorry to see you unhappy, Edgar; but I shall never love any wife of yours as well as I could have loved Madoline."

"Don't say that, mother. That's too hard on the future Mrs. Turchill."

This was a curious speech from a youth who six months ago had protested that he should never marry. But perhaps this was only Edgar's fun. Mrs. Turchill shared the common delusion of mothers, and thought her son a particularly humorous young man.

What a sweetly Arcadian retreat Arden Rectory looked on this fair summer evening, and how savoury was the odour of a *sole au gratin* which blended with the flowery perfumes of the low-panelled hall! The guests had wandered out through the window of the small drawing-room to the verandah and lawn in front of it. That long French window was a blot upon the archi-

tectural beauty of the half-timbered Tudor cottage, but it was very useful for circulation between drawing-room and garden.

Mrs. Ferrers and Madoline were sitting under the verandah; Daphne was standing a little way off on the lawn talking to the Rector and Gerald Goring. She was speaking with intense animation, her face full of brightness. Edgar darted off to join the group, directly he had shaken hands with the two ladies, leaving his mother to subside into one of those new-fangled bamboo chairs which she felt assured would leave its basket-work impression on her velvet gown.

"Edgar," cried Daphne as he came towards her, "did you ever hear of such a heathen—a man born on the soil—a very pagan?"

"Who is the culprit?" asked Edgar; "and what has he done?"

"Mr. Goring has never seen Ann Hathaway's cottage."

"I don't believe he knew who Ann Hathaway was till we told him," said the Rector, with his fat laugh.

"And he has ridden and driven through Shottery hundreds of times, and he never stopped to look at the cottage where Shakespeare—the most wonderful man in the whole world—wooed and won his wife."

"I have heard it dimly suggested that she wooed and won him," remarked Gerald placidly; "she was old enough."

"You are too horrid," cried Daphne. "Would you be surprised to hear that Americans cross the Atlantic—three thousand miles of winds and waves and sea-sickness — on purpose to see Stratford-on-Avon, and Shottery, and Wilmcote, and Snitterfield."

"I could believe anything of a Yankee," answered Gerald, unmoved by these reproaches. "But why Wilmcote? why Snitterfield? They are as poky little settlements as you could find in any agricultural district."

"Did you ever hear of such hideous ignorance?" cried Daphne, "and in a son of the soil. You are most unworthy of the honour of having been raised in Shakespeare's country. Why John

Shakespeare was born at Snitterfield, and Mary Arden lived with her father at Wilmcote; and it was there he courted her."

"John—Mary—oh, distant relations of the poet's, I suppose?" inquired Gerald easily.

"This is revolting," exclaimed Daphne; "but he is shamming—he must be shamming."

"Punish him for his ignorance, whether it is real or pretended," cried Edgar. "Make him row us all down to Stratford to-morrow morning; and then we'll walk him over to Shottery, and make him give a new gown to the nice old woman who keeps the cottage."

"A new gown," echoed Daphne contemptuously; "he ought to be made to give her a cow—a beautiful mouse-coloured Channel Island cow."

"I'll give her anything you like, as long as you don't bore me to death about Shakespeare. I hate sights and lions of all kinds. I went through Frankfort without looking at the house where Goethe was born."

"A depraved desire to be singular," said the

Rector. "I think he ought to forfeit a cow to Mrs. Baker. Rhoda, my love," glancing furtively at his watch, "our friends are all here. Todd is usually more punctual."

Mrs. Ferrers, Lina, and Mrs. Turchill had strolled out to join the others. The prim rustic matron was looking at Daphne with astonishment rather than admiration. She was pretty, no doubt. Mrs. Turchill had never seen a more transparent complexion, or lovelier eyes; but there was a reckless vivacity about the girl's manner which horrified the thoroughly British matron.

"Daphne," said Edgar, "I hope you haven't forgotten my mother. Mother, this is Daphne."

Mrs. Turchill drew back a pace or two with extreme deliberation, and sank gracefully in the curtsy which she had been taught by the Leamington dancing-master—an undoubted Parisian—five-and-thirty years ago. After the curtsy she extended her hand and allowed Daphne to shake it.

"Come, Mrs. Turchill," said the Rector, offering his arm. "Goring, bring Miss Lawford; Turchill will take care of my wife; and Daphne"—he

paused, smiling at the fair young face and slender girlish figure in soft white muslin—"Daphne shall have my other arm, and sit on my left hand. I feel there is a bond of friendship between us now that I find she is so fond of Shakespeare."

"I'm afraid I know Hamlet's soliloquies better than I do my duty to my neighbour," said Daphne, on the way to the dining-room, remembering how the Rector used to glower at her under his heavy brows when she broke down in that portion of the Church Catechism.

Mrs. Ferrers, from her opposite seat at the oval table, had a full view of her husband's demeanour, across the roses and maiden-hair ferns and old Derby crimson and purple dessert dishes. It was rather trying to her to see that he devoted himself entirely to Daphne during the pauses of the meal; and that, while he as in duty bound provided for all Mrs. Turchill's corporeal needs, and was solicitous that she should do ample justice to his wines and his dishes, he allowed her mind to starve upon the merest scraps of speech dropped into her ear at long intervals.

Nor was Edgar much better behaved to Mrs. Ferrers, for he sank into such a slough of despond at finding himself separated from Daphne, that his conversational sources ran suddenly dry, and Rhoda's lively inquiries about the plays and pictures he had just been seeing elicited only the humiliating fact that she, who had not seen them, knew a great deal more about them than he who had.

"What did you think of the Millais landscape?" she asked.

"Was there a landscape by Millais? I thought he was a portrait painter."

This looked hopeless, but she tried again.

"And Frith's picture; you saw that of course."

"No, I didn't," he replied, brightening; "but I saw the people looking at it. It was immensely good, I believe. There was a railing, and a policeman to make the people move on. My mother was delighted. She and another lady trod on each other's gowns in their eagerness to get at the picture. I believe they would have come to blows, if it hadn't been for the policeman."

"And there was Miss Thompson's picture."

"Yes; and another crowd. That is the sort of picture mother enjoys. I think the harder the struggle is the better she likes the picture."

Gerald and Madoline were sitting side by side, talking as happily as if they had been in Eden. All the world might have heard their conversation —there were no secrets, there was no exchange of confidences—and yet they were as far away from the world about them, and as completely out of it, as if they had been in the planet Venus, rising so calmly yonder above the willows, and sending one tremulous arrow of light deep down into the dark brown river. For these two Mrs. Todd's most careful achievements were as nothing. Her *sole au gratin* might have been served with horse-radish sauce—or fried onions; her *vol-au-vent* might have been as heavy as suet-pudding; her *blanquette* might have been bill-sticker's paste; her *soufflé* might have been flavoured with peppermint instead of *vanille*; and they would hardly have discovered that anything was wrong.

And what delight it was by-and-by to wander out into the cool garden, leaving the Rector to prose

to poor Edgar over his Chambertin, and to lose themselves in the shadowy shrubbery, where the perfume of golden broom and mock orange seemed intensified by the darkness. Daphne sat in the quaint old candle-lit drawing-room conversing with the two matrons—Aunt Rhoda inclined to lecture; Mrs. Turchill inclined to sleepiness, having eaten a more elaborate dinner than she was used to, and feeling an uncomfortable tightness in the region of her velvet waistband.

Edgar got away from the Rector as soon as he decently could, and came to the relief of the damsel.

"Well, mother, how are you and Daphne getting on?" he asked cheerily. "I hope you have made her promise to come to see you at Hawksyard."

Mrs. Turchill started from semi-somnolence, and her waistband gave a little creak.

"I shall be delighted if Madoline will bring her sister to call on me some day," she replied stiffly, addressing herself to nobody in particular.

"Call on you—some day! What an invitation!" cried Edgar. "Why, mother, what has become of

your old-fashioned hospitality? I want Daphne to come and stay with you, and to run about the house with you, and help you in your dairy and poultry-yard—and—get used to the place."

Get used to the place! Why should Daphne get used to the place? For what reason was a fair-haired chit in a white frock suddenly projected upon Mrs. Turchill's cows and poultry—cows as sacred in her mind as if she had been a Hindoo; poultry which she only allowed the most trusted of her dependents to attend upon? She felt a sudden sinking of the heart, which was much worse than after-dinner tightness. Could it be that Edgar, her cherished Edgar, was going to throw himself away upon such a frivolous chit as this; a mere school-girl, without the slightest pretension to deportment?

Daphne all this time sat in a low basket-chair by the open window, and looked up at Edgar with calm friendly eyes—eyes which were at least without guile when they looked at him.

CHAPTER III.

"AFTER MY MIGHT FUL FAYNE WOLD I YOU PLESE."

THE day after the family dinner was hopelessly wet; so the expedition to Shottery, proposed by Edgar Turchill and seconded by Daphne, was indefinitely postponed. The summer fleeted by, the beautiful bounteous summer, with her lap full of sweet-scented flowers; the corn grew tall, the hay was being carted in many a meadow within sound of Stratford bells; and the woods began to put on that look of dull uniform green which indicates the beginning of the end. For the sisters at South Hill, for Gerald Goring and Edgar Turchill, July and August had been one long holiday. There was so little in life for these young

people to do except take their pleasure. Theirs was an existence of perpetual rose-gathering; and the roses of life budded and bloomed for them with an inexhaustible fertility. Perhaps Madoline was the only one among them who had any idea of duty. Edgar was an affectionate son, a good master, and a liberal landlord, but he had never been called upon to sacrifice his own inclinations for the welfare of others, and he had never given his mind to any of the graver questions of the day. To him it mattered very little how the labouring classes as a body were taught and housed, so long as the peasants on his own land had decent cottages, and were strangers to want. It irked him not whether the mass of mankind were Jews or Gentiles, Ritualists, Dissenters, or rank unbelievers, so long as he sat in the old cloth-lined family pew on Sunday morning, assisting at the same service which had been all-sufficient for his father, and seeing his dependents deporting themselves discreetly in their places in the gallery. His life was a narrow life, travelling in a narrow path that had been worn for him by the footsteps

of his ancestors. He was a good man, in a limited way. But he had never read the modern gospel, according to Thomas Carlyle, which after all is but an expansion of the Parable of the Talents: and he knew not that every man must work after some fashion or other, and do something for the time in which he lives. He was so thoroughly honest and true-hearted, that if the narrowness and uselessness of his life had been revealed to him he would assuredly have girded his loins and taken up the pilgrim's staff. Never having had any such revelation he took his pleasure as innocently as a school-boy at home for the holidays, and had no idea that he was open to the same reproach which that man received who had buried the wealth entrusted to him.

He was as near happiness in this bright summer-tide as a mortal can hope to be. The greater part of his days were spent with Daphne, and Daphne was always delighted. True that she was changeable as the light July winds, and that there were times when she most unmercifully snubbed him. But to be snubbed by her was better than the

smiles and blandishments of other women. She was given to that coyness and skittishness, the *grata protervitas*, which seems to have been the chief fascination of the professional beauty of the Augustan era. She was as coy as Chloe; coquettish as Glycera; fickle as Lydia, who, supposing there was only one lady of that name, and she a real personage, was rather too bad. Daphne was half-a-dozen girls in one; sometimes welcoming her swain so sweetly that he felt sure she loved him, and the next day turning from him with scornful impatience, as if his very presence were weariness to her.

He bore it all. "Being her slave what could he do," etc. He had Shakespeare's sonnets by heart, and was somewhat of the slavish lover therein depictured. His Lydia might flout him to-day, and he was just as ready to fetch and carry for her on the morrow. She had changed, and for the worse, since the sweet fresh early summer-tide when they two had breakfasted *tête-à-tête* in the boat-house. She was not so even-tempered. She was ever so much more capricious and exacting;

and she was prone to gloomy intervals which anyone other than a lover might have ascribed to sulks. Edgar wondered, not without sorrow, at the change; but it was not in him to blame her. He made all manner of excuses. Bad health was, perhaps, at the root of these discords. She might be a victim to obscure neuralgic pains and aches, which she heroically concealed from her friends—albeit her fair and fresh appearance belied the supposition. Perhaps it was the weather which made her occasionally cross. Who could go on in simpering placidity with the thermometer at ninety in the shade?

"And then we spoil her," argued Edgar, urging his final plea. "She is so bewitching that one can't help spoiling her. Madoline spoils her. I am an idiot about her; and even Goring, for all his contemptuous airs and graces, is almost as easily fooled by her as the rest of us. If we were more rational in our treatment of her, she would be less faulty. But then her very faults are charming."

It had been, or had seemed to be, an utterly

happy summer for everybody at South Hill. Two months of splendid weather; two months wasted in picnicking, and excursionising, driving, boating, lawn-tennis, tea-drinking, journeying to and fro between South Hill and Goring Abbey to watch the progress of the hot-houses, which, despite the unlimited means of their proprietor, progressed with a provoking slowness.

For some little time after Gerald's arrival Daphne had held herself as much as possible in the background. She had tried to keep aloof from the life of the two lovers; but this Madoline would not suffer.

"You are to be in all our amusements, and to hear all our plans, dear," she told her sister one day. "I never meant that you and I should be less together, or less dear to each other, because of Gerald's return. Do you think my heart is not big enough to hold you both?"

"I know it is, Lina. But I fancy Mr. Goring would like to have it all to himself, and would soon get to look upon me as an intruder, if I were too much with you. You had better leave me at home

to amuse myself on the river, or to play ball with Goldie, who is more than a person as to sense and sensibility."

To this Madoline would not consent. Her love of her sister was so tempered with pity, so chastened and softened by her knowledge of the shadow that darkened the beginning of Daphne's life, that it was much deeper and stronger than the affection common among sisters. She wanted to make up to Daphne for all she had lost; for the cruel mother who had deserted her in her cradle; for the father's unjust resentment. And then there was the delightful idea that Edgar Turchill, that second best of men, whom she had rejected as a husband, would by-and-by be her brother; and that Daphne's future, sheltered and cherished by a good man's devoted love, would be as complete and perfect a life as the fairest and sweetest of women need desire to live. Madoline had quite made up her mind that Edgar was to marry Daphne. That he was passionately in love with her was obvious to the meanest capacity. Everybody at South Hill knew it except perhaps Daphne herself. That she liked him with

placid sisterly regard was equally clear. And who could doubt that time would ripen this sisterly regard into that warmer feeling which could alone recompense him for his devotion? Thus, against the girl's own better sense, it became an understood fact that Daphne was to be a third in all the lovers' amusements and occupations, and that Mr. Turchill was very frequently to make a fourth in the same. To Gerald Goring the presence of these two seemed in no wise obnoxious. Daphne's vivacity amused him, and he looked upon his old friend Turchill as a considerably inferior order of being, not altogether unamusing after his kind. He was not an exacting lover. He accepted his bliss as a settled thing; he knew that no rock on Cornwall's rugged coast was more securely based than his hold on Madoline's affection. He was troubled by no jealous doubts; his love knew no hot fits or cold fits, no quarrelling for the after bliss of reconciliation. There was nothing of the *grata protervitas* in Madoline's gentle nature. Her well-balanced mind could not have stooped to coquetry.

August was drawing to its close. It had been

a month of glorious weather, such halcyon days as made the farmer's occupation seem just the most delightful calling possible for man. There was not much arable land within ken of South Hill, but what cornfields there were promised abundant crops; and one of the magnates of the land—who, in his dudgeon against a revolutionary re-adjustment of the game-laws at that time looming in the dim future, had rough-ploughed a thousand acres or so of his best land rather than let it under obnoxious conditions—may have thought regretfully of the corn that might have been reaped off those breezy uplands and in those fertile valleys, where at his bidding sprang cockle instead of barley. It was a month of holiday-making for everybody—for even the labour of the fields, looked at from the outside, seemed like holiday-making. Quiet little Stratford, flushed with spasmodic life by the arrival of a corps of artillery, tootled on trumpets, and daddy-mammyed on drums; while the horn of the Leamington coach blew lustily every morning and afternoon, and the foxhound puppy at nurse at The Red Horse found the middle of the highway

no longer a comfortable place for his after-dinner nap. It was the season of American tourists, doing Stratford and its environs, guide-book in hand, and crowding in to The Red Horse parlour, after luncheon, to see the veritable chair in which Washington Irving used to sit.

There came a drowsy sunny noontide when the lovers had no particular employment for their day. They had been reduced to playing billiards directly after breakfast, until Gerald discovered that it was too warm for billiards, whereupon the four players —Lina, Daphne, Gerald, and Turchill—repaired to the garden in search of shade.

"Shade!" cried Daphne indignantly. "Who wants shade? Who could ever have too much of Phœbus Apollo? Not I. We see too little of his godlike countenance, and I will never turn my back upon him."

She seated herself on the burnt grass in the full blaze of the sun, while the other three sat in the shadow of an immense Spanish chestnut, which grew wide and low, making a leafy tent.

"This is a horrid idle way of spending one's

day," said Daphne, jumping up with sudden impatience, after they had all sat for half an hour talking lazily of the weather and their neighbours. "Is there nothing for us to do?"

"Yes, you excitable young person," answered Gerald; "since your restless temper won't let us be comfortable here, we'll make you exert yourself elsewhere. The river is the only place where life can be tolerable upon such a day as this. The nicest thing would be to be in it: the next best thing perhaps is to be on it. You shall row us to Stratford Weir, Miss Daphne."

"I should like it of all things. I am dying for something to do," responded Daphne, brightening. "You'll take an oar, won't you, Edgar?"

"Of course, if you'd really like to go. By-the-bye, suppose we improve the occasion by landing at Stratford, and walking Gerald over to Shottery to see Ann Hathaway's cottage."

"Delicious," cried Daphne. "It shall be a regular Shakespearian pilgrimage. We'll take tea and things, and have kettledrum in Mrs. Baker's house-place. She'll let me do what I like, I know.

And Mr. Goring shall carry the basket, as a punishment for his hideous apathy. And we'll talk to him about Shakespeare's early life all the way."

"Shakespeare's life, forsooth!" cried Gerald scornfully. "Who is there that knows anything about it? Half-a-dozen entries in a parish register; a few traditional sayings of Ben Jonson's; and a pack of sentimentalists—English and German—evolve out of their inner consciousness a sentimental biography. 'We may picture him as a youth going across the fields to Shottery: because it is the shortest way, and a man of his Titanic mind would naturally have taken it: yes, over the same meadows we tread this day: on the same ground, if not actually on the same grass.' Or again: 'Seeing that Apostle-spoons were still in common use in the reign of Elizabeth, it may be fairly concluded that the immortal poet used one for his bread and treacle: for who shall affirm that he did not eat bread and treacle, that the inspired lad of the Stratford grammar-school had not the same weaknesses and boyish affections as his schoolmates? Who would not love to possess

Shakespeare's spoon, or to eat out of Shakespeare's porringer?' That is the kind of rot which clever men write about Shakespeare; and I think it is because I have been overdosed with such stuff that I have learned to detest the bard in his private character."

"You are a hardened infidel, and you shall certainly carry the basket."

"What, madam, would you degrade me to a hireling's office? 'Gregory, o' my word, we'll not carry coals.'"

"There, you see," cried Daphne triumphantly, "you can't live without quoting him. He has interwoven himself with our daily speech."

"Because we are parrots, without ideas of our own," answered Gerald.

"Oh, I am proud of belonging to the soil on which he was reared. I wish there was one drop of his blood in my veins. I envy Edgar because his remote ancestry claim kin with the Ardens. I almost wish I were a Turchill."

"That would be so easy to accomplish," said Edgar softly, blushing at his own audacity.

Daphne noticed neither his speech nor his confusion. She was all excitement at the idea of an adventurous afternoon, were it only a visit to the familiar cottage.

"Madoline, dearest, may I order them to pack us a really nice tea?" she asked.

"Yes, dear, if we are all decided upon going."

"It seems to me that the whole thing has been decided for us," said Gerald, smiling indulgently at the vivacious face, radiant in the broad noonday light, the willowy figure in a white gown flecked and chequered with sunshine.

"You order me to row you down the Avon," said Daphne, "and I condemn you to a penitential walk to Shottery. You ought by rights to go barefoot, dressed in a white sheet; only I don't think it would become you."

"It might be too suggestive of the Turkish bath," said Gerald. "Well, I submit, and if needs be I'll carry the basket, provided you don't plague me too much about your poet."

"I move an amendment," interposed Edgar. "Sir Vernon is to take the chair at Warwick at the

Yeomanry dinner, so Miss Lawford is off duty. Let us all go on to Hawksyard and dine with the old mother. It'll delight her, and it won't be half bad fun for us. There'll be the harvest moon to light you home, Madoline, and the drive will be delicious in the cool of the——"

"Cockchafers," cried Gerald. "They are particularly cool at that hour—come banging against one's nose with ineffable assurance."

"Say you'll come, Lina," pleaded Edgar, "and I'll send one of Sir Vernon's stable-boys to Hawksyard on my horse with a line to the mater, if I may."

"I should enjoy it immensely—if Gerald likes, and if you are sure Mrs. Turchill would like to have us."

"I think I'd better be out of it. I'm not a favourite with Mrs. Turchill," said Daphne bluntly.

"Oh, Daphne!" cried Turchill ruefully.

"Oh, Edgar!" cried Daphne, mocking him. "Can you lay your hand upon your heart, and declare, as an honest man, that your mother likes me?"

"Perhaps not quite so much as she will when she knows more of you," answers the Squire of Hawksyard, as red as a turkey-cock. "The fact is, she so worships Madoline that you are a little thrown into the shade."

"Of course. How could anyone who likes Madoline care about me? It isn't possible," retorted Daphne, with a somewhat bitter laugh. "If I were one of a boisterous brood of underbred girls I might have a chance of being considered just endurable; but as Lina's sister I am as the shadow to the sunlight; I am like the back of a beautiful picture—a square of dirty canvas."

"If you are fishing for compliments, you are wasting trouble," said Gerald. "It is not a day on which any man will rack his brains in the composition of pretty speeches."

"May I write the note? May I send the boy?" asked Edgar.

Lina looked at her lover, and finding him consentient, consented; whereupon Edgar hurried off, intensely pleased, to make his arrangements.

So far, he had been disappointed in the hope

of seeing Daphne a frequent guest at Hawksyard, the petted companion and plaything of his mother. He had made for himself an almost Arcadian picture: Daphne basking on the stone bench in the Baconian garden; amusing herself with the poultry; even milking a cow on occasion; and making junkets in the picturesque old dairy. He had fancied her upstairs and downstairs, in my lady's chamber; unearthing all Mrs. Turchill's long-hoarded treasures of laces and ribbons, kept to be looked at rather than to be worn; sorting the house-linen, which would have stocked a Swiss hotel, and which ran the risk of perishing by slow decay upon its shelves or ever it was worn by usage. He had pictured her accepted as the daughter of the house; waking the solemn old echoes with her glad young voice; fondling his dogs; riding his hunters in the green lanes, and across the level fields. She was pining to ride; but of the six horses at South Hill there was not one which Sir Vernon would allow her to mount.

The pleasant picture was as yet only a phantasm of the mind. Mrs. Turchill had not yet taken to

Daphne. She was a good woman—truthful, honest, kindhearted—but she had her prejudices, and was passing obstinate.

"I don't deny her prettiness," she said, when Edgar tried to convince her that not to admire Daphne was a fault in herself, "but she is not a girl that I could ever make a friend of."

"That's because you don't take the trouble to know her, mother. If you would ask her here oftener——"

"I hope I know my place, Edgar," said the mistress of the Grange stiffly. "If Miss Daphne Lawford wishes to improve my acquaintance she knows where to find me."

But Daphne had taken no pains to secure to herself the advantage of Mrs. Turchill's friendship. There was no particular reason why she should go to Hawksyard; so, after one solemn afternoon call with Madoline—on which occasion they were received with chilling formality in the best drawing-room; an apartment with an eight-foot oak dado, deeply-recessed mullioned windows, and a state bedroom adjoining—Daphne went there no more. And

now here was a splendid opportunity of making her at home in the dear old house, and of showing her all the surroundings which its master loved and cherished.

"Best of Mothers," wrote Edgar, "I am going to take you by storm this afternoon. We—Lina, Daphne, Mr. Goring, and I—are going to Shottery, and propose driving on to Hawksyard afterwards. Get up the best dinner you can at so short a notice, and give us your warmest welcome. You had better put out some of Hirsch's Liebfraumilch and a little dry cham. for Goring. The girls drink only water. Let there be syllabubs and junkets and everything pastoral. Don't ask anyone to meet them," added Edgar, with a dread of having the local parson projected on his love-feast; "we want a jolly, free-and-easy evening. Dinner at eight.—Your loving "Ted."

This brief epistle was handed to Mrs. Turchill just as she was sitting down to luncheon. Her first idea was to strike. Her son might have brought home half-a-dozen of his bachelor friends,

and it would have been a pleasure to her to kill fatted calves and put out expensive wines. She would have racked her brain to produce an attractive *menu*, and taxed the resources of poultry-yard and dairy to the uttermost. But to be bidden to prepare a feast for Madoline, who had rejected her paragon son, for the rival who had supplanted him, and for Daphne, whom she most cordially disliked, was something too much. She sat at her simple meal bridling and murmuring to herself in subdued revolt. She was tempted to ring for Rebecca and confide her wrongs to that sympathetic ear; but discretion and her very genuine love for her son prevailed; and instead of summoning Rebecca, she sent for the cook, and announced the dinner party as cheerfully as if it were the fulfilment of a long-cherished desire.

Daphne ran down to the boat-house before the others had finished luncheon, and with Bink's assistance made her boat a picture of comfort. Gerald was excused from the burden of the basket, as that could be conveyed in the carriage which was to pick up the party at Shottery and take

them on to Hawksyard. The old name of the boat had been erased for ever by workmanlike hands the day after Daphne's futile attempt to obliterate it. "Nora Creina" now appeared in fresh gilding above the deposed emperor.

"You ought not to have altered it," said Gerald. "There was something original in calling your boat after a bloodthirsty lunatic. 'Nora Creina' is the essence of Cockneyism."

"It was the boat-builder's suggestion," Daphne answered indifferently. "What's in a name?"

"True! Your boat by any other name would go as fast."

Daphne had to wait some time by the water's edge before the other three came quietly strolling across the meadow. She had been sculling gently up and down under the willows while she waited.

"Now then, Empress," said Gerald, when he had arranged Lina's shawls, and settled her comfortably in her place, "you are to sit beside your sister. Edgar and I will take an oar apiece, while you and Lina amuse us with your conversation."

This nickname of Empress was a reminiscence

of Daphne's adventure in Fontainebleau Forest. It matched very well with her occasional imperiousness, and the association was known only to Gerald Goring and herself. It amused him when he was in a mischievous humour to call her by a name which she never heard without a blush.

"I thought I was to row you," said Daphne.

"No, Empress; as it's all down stream we of the sterner sex will relieve you of the duty. Besides, you could never row comfortably in that go-to-meeting get-up," said Gerald, looking critically at Daphne's straw-coloured Indian silk, embroidered with scarlet poppies and amber wheat-ears, and fluffy with soft lace about the neck and arms, and the Swiss milkmaid's hat with its wreath of cornflowers.

"I could not wear a boating-dress, as we are to dine with Mrs. Turchill," said Daphne.

"You might have worn what you liked," protested Edgar eagerly, "but you look so lovely in that yellow gown that I shall be pleased for my mother to see you in it. She is weak about gowns. I believe she has a wardrobe full of gorgeous attire,

which she and Rebecca review once a week, but which nobody ever wears."

"The gowns will do for the chair-covers of a future generation," said Gerald; "all the chair-covers in my mother's morning-room are made out of the Court trains of her grandmothers and great-aunts. I believe a Court mantle in those days consumed two yards and a half of stuff."

He had taken off his coat, and bared his arms to above the elbow.

"What a splendid stroke you pull still, Goring!" said Edgar admiringly, "and you have the wrist of a navvy."

"One of my paternal inheritances," answered Gerald coolly; "you know my father was a navvy." At which frank speech everybody in the boat blushed except the speaker.

"He must have been a glorious fellow," faltered Edgar, after an awkward pause.

"Any man who can make a million of money, and keep it without leaving speck or flaw upon his good name, must be a glorious fellow," answered Gerald, with more heartiness than was usual to

him. "My father lived to do good to others as well as to himself, and went down to his grave honoured and beloved. I wish I were more like him."

"That's the nicest thing I ever heard you say," exclaimed Daphne.

"Approbation from Sir Hubert Stanley——," murmured Gerald; "I am beginning to feel proud of myself."

They landed at the boat-builder's below the bridge, hard by that decayed old inn which must have seen courtlier company than the waggoners and wayfarers who drink there now. Then they crossed Sir Hugh Clopton's granite bridge, and walked through the quiet town to the meadows that lead to Shottery. It is but a mile from the town to the village, a mile of meadow pathway, every step of which is haunted by ghostly footsteps —the Sacred Way of English literature.

"It's no use telling me not to talk about him," cried Daphne, as she jumped lightly from the top of a stile, the ascent whereof tested the capacity of a fashionable frock; "I cannot tread this

ground without thinking of him. I am positively bursting with the idea of him."

"Which is the fortunate he whose image haunts you?" asked Gerald, with that languid upward twitch of his dark brows which gracefully expressed a mild drawing-room cynicism. "Do these fields suggest grave thoughts about tenant-right or game-laws, or the land question generally? Is it Beaconsfield or Gladstone whose *eidolon* pursues you?"

"Please don't be disgusting," cried Daphne. "*Can* one think of anybody in these meadows except——"

"The inevitable William. A man does not live near Stratford with impunity. He must be dosed. Well, child, what are you bursting to say?"

"I have been thinking what a happiness it is to know that the dear creature travelled so little," responded Daphne; "and that whether he talks of Bohemia, or France, or Germany, Rome, Verona, Elsinore, or Inverness——"

"Somebody wrote a treatise an inch thick to

show that Shakespeare may have gone to Scotland with the king's players, but I fancy he left his case as hypothetical as he found it," interjected Gerald.

"Whether he talks of Athens—or Africa—he really means Warwickshire," pursued Daphne. "It is his own native county that is always present to his mind. Florizel and Perdita make love in our meadows. There is the catalogue of flowers just as they bloom to-day. And Rosalind's cottage was in a lane near the few old oaks which still remain to show where Arden Forest once stood. And poor Ophelia drowned herself in one of the backwaters of our Avon. I can show you the very willow growing aslant the brook."

"A backwater isn't a brook," murmured Edgar mildly.

"I allow that local colour is not our William's strong point," answered Gerald. "Not being a traveller, he would have done better had he never ventured beyond the limits of his Warwickshire experience; for in that case he would not have imagined lions in the streets of Rome, or a sea-coast in Bohemia."

"Wait till you write a play or a novel," retorted Daphne, "and you'll find you'll have to adapt yourself to circumstances."

"That's exactly what your divine bard did not do. He adapted circumstances to suit his plays."

CHAPTER IV.

"LOVE IS A THING, AS ANY SPIRIT, FREE."

Past a garden or two and a few cottages; a long garden wall with heavy coping, shutting in treasures of fruit and vegetables; an old inn; a new school-house, built at the corner of a lane shaded by as stately an avenue of elms as any nobleman need desire for the approach to his mansion. And yet mansion there is none at the end of this verdant aisle. The lane is only an accommodation road leading to somebody's farm. A youthful monitor is trying to drill some small boys in front of the school-porch, and the small boys are defying him; whereat a shrill-voiced woman, unseen in the interior of the school, calls out an occasional word

of reproof. All the houses in the little village belong to the past—they have the grace of a day that is dead. In a farm garden a buxom servant in a kilted petticoat is feeding a family of gigantic hens and chickens with something thick and slab out of an iron pot.

Daphne and her companions felt that there could have been little change since the old romantic Elizabethan time. The village lay off the beaten tracks. Three or four modern houses, scattered about here and there in spacious gardens, were the only addition time had made to Shottery.

They walked briskly along the narrow road, across the bridge where the shallow streamlet came tumbling picturesquely over gray stones. Then a few paces, and before them stood the little block of cottages which genius has transformed into a temple. Whether the building was originally one house, it were difficult to decide. The levels are different; but a variety in levels was the order of that day. The whole block is a timber-framed structure—a panelled house, the panels filled with dab and wattle. Jutting casements, diamond-paned,

look out upon an ancient garden, and an ancient well. Beside the house and garden there is an old orchard, where on this day a couple of sheep are placidly nibbling the sweet grass. The cottage is almost smothered in greenery. Honeysuckle, jasmine, roses, hang about the walls as if they loved them. The old timber porch is curtained with flowers.

The South Hill carriage was waiting in the lane when Daphne and her companions arrived. The basket had been duly delivered over to Mrs. Baker. She was standing at the door awaiting them with a smiling welcome.

"So glad to see you, ladies. The kettle's on the boil, and you can have your tea as soon as you please."

"Thanks, you dear thing," cried Daphne; "but isn't it almost sacrilege to drink tea in his room?"

"It isn't everybody I'd let do it, miss; not any of those Americans; though I must say they're uncommonly civil, and know more about Shakespeare than the common run of English do, and are more liberal in their ways too," added Mrs.

Baker, with a lively remembrance of half-crowns from Transatlantic visitors.

"Mrs. Baker," began Daphne in a solemn tone, laying a little tawny-gloved hand lightly on the collar of Gerald's coat, "you see this man?"

"Yes, miss, and a very nice-looking gentleman he is for anybody to look at," answered Mrs. Baker smirkingly, making up her mind that the tall dark-eyed gentleman must belong to one or other of the two young ladies.

"He may be nice to the outward eye," said Daphne gravely, "but he is dust and ashes inside. He is anathema maranatha, or he ought to be, if there were anybody in Warwickshire who knew how to anathematise him properly. He lives in this county—within twelve miles of this house—and he has never been to see the ingle-nook where Shakespeare courted his wife. I'm afraid it won't make the faintest impression upon his callous mind when I tell him that you are a lineal descendant of the Hathaways, and that this house has never been out of a Hathaway's possession since Shakespeare's time."

"I appreciate the lady for her own sake, and don't care a jot for her ancestry," answered Gerald, with a friendly air.

They followed Mrs. Baker into the house-place, where all was cool and shadowy after the glare of sunshine outside. It was a low but somewhat spacious room, with casements looking back and front; recessed casements, furnished with oaken seats, one of which was known as the lovers' seat; for here, the lovers of the present day argued by analogy, William and Ann must have sat to watch many a sunset, and many a moonlit sky. Here they must have whispered their foolish lovers' talk in the twilight, and shyly kissed at parting. The fire-place was in a deep recess, a roomy ingle-nook where half-a-dozen people could have gathered comfortably round the broad open hearth. On one side of the ingle-nook was a cupboard in the wall, known as the bacon-cupboard; on the other the high-backed settle. Opposite the fire-place there was a noble old dresser—polished oak or mahogany—with turned legs and a good deal of elaborate carpentry: a dresser which was supposed to be

Elizabethan, but which was suggestive rather of the Carolian period. The dark brown panels made an effective background for an old willow dinner-service.

Daphne made Mr. Goring explore every inch of the house which Mrs. Baker was able conveniently to show. She led him up a break-neck little staircase, showed him lintels and doorposts, and locks and bolts, which had been extant in Shakespeare's time; made him admire the queer little carved four-poster which was even older than the poet's epoch; and the old fine linen sheet, richly worked by patient fingers, which had been in the family for centuries, only used at a birth or a death. She excused him from nothing; and he bore the infliction with calm resignation, and allowed her to lead him back to the house-place in triumph.

Madoline and Edgar Turchill were sitting in the lovers' seat, talking, after having unpacked the basket, and made all preparation for tea, assisted by Mrs. Baker's modest handmaiden.

"Now, Mr. Goring," said Daphne, when she and Gerald and the old lady had rejoined the

others, "how do you feel about that Channel Island cow?"

"Oh, I am content," answered Gerald, laughing at her. "I submit to the extortion; you carry matters with such a high hand that if you were to demand all my flocks and herds I should hardly feel surprised."

"Mrs. Baker," said Daphne, with a businesslike air, "this gentleman is going to give you a cow."

"Oh, miss, you don't mean it, surely!" murmured Mrs. Baker, overcome with confusion.

"Yes; a lovely fawn-coloured, hazel-eyed Alderney. Don't refuse her. He can as well afford to give you a cow as I can to give you a neck-ribbon. When would you like the animal sent home? To-morrow morning? Yes, of course; to-morrow morning. You hear, Mr. Goring? And now you may consider yourself forgiven, and I'll show you the visitors'-book and all the interesting autographs."

They went over to the table near the window, and turned the leaves of that volume! Alas! how many a hand that had written in it was now dust.

Here was the signature of Charles Dickens, nearly thirty years old, and pale with age. But the descendant of the Hathaways remembered the day when it was written, and recalled the visit with pride.

"He took the book out into the garden, and sat on the stone slab over the well to write his name," she said. "I remember how full of life and fun he and Mr. Mark Lemon were; he was laughing as he wrote, and he looked at everything, and was so pleased and so pleasant."

Sir Walter Scott's name was in an older book. Both of these were as dead—and as undying—as Shakespeare. And compared with these two immortal names all the rest of the signatures in the big book were zero.

It was the merriest tea-party imaginable. Mrs. Baker's best Pembroke table had been brought into the middle of the room; her best tea-pot and cups and saucers were set out upon it. Cakes and hot-house fruit had been liberally supplied by Mrs. Spicer. Daphne whispered in her sister's ear a request that Mrs. Baker might be invited to join

them, to which Madoline nodded a smiling assent. Was not the descendant of the Hathaways a lady by right of her gentle manners and ancient descent? She belonged to a class that is an honour to the land—the honest independent yeoman who tills the soil his forefathers cultivated before him. The birth and death sheet in the oak chest upstairs was like a patent of nobility. And yet perhaps not one of these agricultural Hathaways had ever enjoyed as large an income as a first-class mechanic in a manufacturing town—a man who dies and leaves not a rap behind him to show that he was once respectable. They had been upheld in their places by the pride of race, which the mechanic knows not.

Mrs. Baker was installed in the place of honour in front of the tea-tray, and asked everyone in her nice old-fashioned way whether their tea was to their liking. Upon being coaxed to talk she told stories about the defunct Hathaways, and explained how the house that had once been all one dwelling-place had come to be divided.

It was Daphne and she who supplied the con-

versation. The two young men looked on amused; Edgar openly admiring the bright changeful face under the little Swiss hat. Lina was pleased that her sister should be so innocently glad.

"Oh, how happy I am," cried Daphne suddenly, in a pause of the talk, clasping her hands above her head in a kind of ecstasy. "If it could only last!"

"Why should it not last?" asked Edgar, in his matter-of-fact way.

Gerald looked at her gravely, with a puzzled look. Yes; this was the girl who had stood in the dazzling sunshine beside the lake at Fontainebleau, in whose hand he had read the forecast of an evil fate.

"God help her!" he thought, "she is so impulsive—such a creature of the moment. How is such an one to travel safely through the thorny ways of life? Happily there seems little fear of thorniness for her footsteps. Here is my honest Turchill dying for her—and just the kind of man to make her an excellent husband, and give the lie to palmistry. Yet it seems a common-place fate; almost as

vulgar as the Italian warehouse in Oxford Street."

He sat musing thus in the lazy afternoon atmosphere, and watching Daphne with something of an artistic rather than an actually friendly interest. It seemed a shallow nature that must be always expressing itself in speech or movement. There could be no depth of thought allied with such vivacity—keenness of feeling, perhaps, but for the moment only.

Nobody was in a hurry to leave the cottage. Tea-drinking is of all sensualities the most intellectual. The mind is refreshed rather than the body. There was nothing coarse in the meal. The golden tinge of the almond pound-cake—a master-work of Mrs. Spicer's—contrasted with the purple bloom of grapes and blue-gages, the olive tint of ripe figs.

"We are making such a tremendous meal that I'm afraid we shall none of us do justice to my mother's dinner," remonstrated Edgar at last, "and that will make her miserable."

"A quarter to seven," said Gerald, stealing a

glance at a little effeminate watch. "Don't you think it is time we should descend from this Shakespearian empyrean to common earth?"

This was the signal for a general move. The heavy, comfortable-looking old carriage-horses had been walked up and down in shady places, while the portly coachman dozed on his box, and the more vivacious footman execrated the flies. And now the landau bowled briskly along the smooth high road to Hawksyard, containing as cheerful a quartette as ever went out to dinner.

Madoline was delighted to see her sister so happy, delighted at Edgar's obvious devotion. She had no doubt that his love would be rewarded in due course. It is in a woman's nature to be grateful for such honest affection, to be won by such disinterested fidelity.

The brazen hands of the old clock at Hawksyard indicated a quarter to eight, as the carriage drove across the bridge, and under the arched gateway into the quadrangular garden, with its sunk pathways, and shallow steps, and border-lines of crumbling old stone. Mrs. Turchill was standing

on the threshold—a dignified figure in a gray poplin gown and old thread-lace cap and ruffles—ready to receive them. She gave Madoline her blandest smile, and was tolerably gracious to the rival who had spoiled her son's chances; but she could not bring herself to be cordial to Daphne. Her silk bodice became as rigid as an Elizabethan corset when she greeted that obnoxious damsel. She had a shrewd suspicion that it was for her sake the fatted calf had been killed, and all the available cream in the dairy squandered upon sweets and made dishes, with a reckless disregard of next Saturday's butter-making. Yet as Daphne shyly put out her hand to accept that cold greeting, too sensitive not to perceive the matron's unfriendliness, Mrs. Turchill could but own to herself that the minx was passing lovely. The brilliant gray eyes, shadowed with darkest lashes; the dark brows and golden hair; the complexion of lilies and roses; the sensitive mouth; the play of life and colour in a face that varied with every thought—yes; this made beauty which even Mrs. Turchill could not deny.

"Handsome is that handsome does," thought the dowager. "God forbid that my boy should trust the happiness of his life to such a butterfly."

Inwardly rebellious, she had nevertheless done her duty as a good housekeeper. The old oak-dadoed drawing-room was looking its prettiest, brightened by oriental jars and bowls of scarlet geraniums and creamy roses, lavender and honeysuckle. The silver chandelier and fire-irons were resplendent with recent polishing. The diamond-paned lattices were opened to admit the scent of heliotrope and mignonette from the garden on the other side of the moat; while one deeply-recessed window looking into the quadrangle let in the perfume of the old-world flowers Francis Bacon loved.

Edgar insisted upon showing Daphne the house during the ten minutes before dinner.

"You have only been here once," he said, "and my mother did not show you anything."

After the two girls had taken off their hats in the state bed-chamber next the drawing-room—a room whose walls were panelled with needlework

executed by an ancestress of Edgar's in the reign of Charles the First—they all went off to explore the house; ascending a steep secret stair which they entered from a door in the panelling of the dining-room; exploring long slippery corridors and queer little rooms that opened mysteriously out of other rooms; and triangular dressing-closets squeezed into a corner between a chimney and an outer wall; laughing at the old furniture: the tall toppling four-post bedsteads; the sage-green tapestry; the capacious old grates, or still older brazen dogs; the inimitable Dutch tiles.

"It must be heavenly to live in such a funny old house," cried Daphne, as they came cautiously down the black oak staircase, slippery as glass, pausing to admire a ramshackle collection of Indian curios and Japanese pottery on the broad window-ledge halfway down.

"If you would only try it," murmured Edgar close in her ear, and looking ineffably sheepish as he spoke.

Again the all-significant words fell unheeded. She skipped lightly down the remaining stairs,

protesting she could get accustomed to them in no time.

"'So light a foot will ne'er wear out the everlasting flint,'" said Gerald.

"Didn't I tell you so? You can't live without quoting him," cried Daphne triumphantly.

The dinner went off merrily. It was a capital dinner in a good old English style, ponderous but excellent. There were none of those refinements which distinguished the board over which Mrs. Ferrers presided. The attempts at elegance smacked of a banished era. A turbot decorated with sliced lemon and barberries; a befrilled haunch, exhibiting its noble proportions in a heavy silver dish; a superabundance of creams and jellies and trifles and syllabubs; an elaborate dessert lying in state on the sideboard, to be slowly and laboriously transferred to the polished oak after the cloth was drawn; and the coachman to help wait at table. The whole thing was rustic and old-fashioned, and Edgar was afraid Daphne was secretly turning it all into ridicule. Yet she seemed happy, and she said so much in praise

of Hawksyard and of the perfect order in which the house was kept, that Mrs. Turchill's heart began to soften towards her.

"You seem fond of the country, and of countrified ways, Miss Daphne," said the matron relentingly. "Yet I should have thought a young lady like you would have been pining for London, and balls and theatres."

"I never was at a dance in my life," answered Daphne, "and only once at a theatre, and that was the great opera-house in Paris. I don't think I should ever care to go to a meaner theatre. My thoughts went up so high that night, I shouldn't like to let them down again by seeing trumpery."

"The London theatres are very nice," said Mrs. Turchill, not quite following Daphne's idea. "But they are rather warm in summer. Yet one likes to go up to town in the height of the season. There is so much to see."

"Mother's constitution is cast-iron when she gets to London," said Edgar. "She is up at six every morning, and goes to the picture-galleries as soon as the doors are opened; and does her

morning in Hyde Park, and her afternoon in Regent Street, shopping, or staring in at the shop windows; and eats her dinner at the most crowded restaurant I can take her to; and winds up at the theatre. I believe she'd accept a lobster-supper in the Haymarket if I were to offer one."

"Has Miss Daphne Lawford never been in London?" asked Mrs. Turchill.

"Oh, please don't call me Miss. I am never anything but Daphne to my friends."

"You are very kind," answered Mrs. Turchill, stiffening; "but I don't think I could take so great a liberty with you on such a short acquaintance."

"Short acquaintance!" echoed Daphne, laughing. "Why, you must have known me when I was in my cradle."

Mrs. Turchill grew suddenly red, as if the idea were embarrassing.

"I was invited to your christening," she said; "but—afterwards—there were circumstances—Sir Vernon was so often abroad. We did not see much of you."

"If you wish me to feel at home at Hawksyard you must call me Daphne, please," said the girl gently.

Mrs. Turchill did not wish her to feel at home at Hawksyard; yet she could not refuse compliance with so gracious a request.

The ladies rose to retire, Edgar opening the door for them.

"Do you want any more wine, Turchill?" asked Gerald.

"No, not particularly; but you'll try that other claret, won't you?"

"Not a drop of it. I vote we all adjourn to the garden."

So they all went out together into the twilit quadrangle, where the old-fashioned flowers were folding their petals for night and slumber, while the moon was rising above a cluster of stone chimneys. Mrs. Turchill walked once round the little enclosure, discoursing graciously with Madoline, and then confessed to feeling chilly, and being afraid of the night air; although a very clever doctor, with somewhat new-fangled ideas, had told

her that the air was as good by night as by day, provided the weather were dry.

"I think I'll go indoors and sit in the drawing-room till you come in to tea," she said. "I hope you won't think me rude."

Madoline offered to go with her, but this Mrs. Turchill would not allow.

"Young people enjoy a moonlight stroll," she said; "I liked it myself when I was your age. There's no occasion for any of you to hurry. I shall amuse myself with *The Times*. I haven't looked at it yet."

The four being left together naturally divided themselves into two couples. Gerald and Lina seemed fascinated by the flowery quadrangle, with its narrow walks, and ancient dial, on which the moon was now shining. They strolled slowly up and down the paths; or lingered beside the dial; or stood looking down at the fish-pond. Daphne's restless spirit soon tired of these narrow bounds.

"Is there nothing else to look at?" she asked.

"There are the stables, and the dairy, and the farm-yard. But you must see those by daylight;

you must come here for a long day," said Edgar eagerly. "Would you like to see the garden on the other side of the moat?"

"Above all things."

"It is very flat," said Edgar apologetically.

"All the better for tennis."

"Yes, the lawn would make a magnificent tennis-ground. We might have eight courts if we liked. But it is a very common-place garden after South Hill."

"Don't apologise. I am sure it is nice; a dear old-fashioned sort of garden—hollyhocks, and sunflowers, and things."

"My old gardener is rather proud of his hollyhocks."

"Precisely; I knew he would be. And that horrid MacCloskie will hear of nothing but the newest inventions in flowers. He gives us floral figures in Euclid; floral hearth-rugs sprawling over the lawn, as if one of the housemaids had taken out a Persian rug to dust it, and had forgotten to take it in again. He takes tremendous pains to build up beds like supper-dishes—ornamental salads,

don't you know—and calls that high-art gardening. I would rather have your hollyhocks and sunflowers, and the old-fashioned scented clematis climbing about everywhere in a tangled mass of sweetness."

"I'm glad you like antiquated gardens," said Edgar.

They went under the archway, which echoed the sound of their footsteps, and round by a gravel walk to the spacious lawn, and the long border which was the despair of the gardeners when they tried to fill it, and which yet provided flowers enough to keep all the sitting-rooms bright and sweet with summer bloom. The moon was high above Hawksyard by this time: a glorious harvest moon, pouring down her golden light upon tree and flower, and giving intensity to the shadows under the wall. The waters of the moat looked black, save where the moonbeams touched them; and yonder under the tall spreading walnut boughs the gravel walk was all in shadow.

Daphne paced the lawn, disputing as to how many tennis-courts one might have on such an extensive parallelogram. She admired the height

of the hollyhocks, and regretted that their colour did not show by moonlight. The sunflowers appeared to better advantage.

"What awful stories poets tell about them!" said Daphne. "Just look at that brazen-faced creature, smirking at the moon; just as if she had never turned her head sunwards in her life."

Edgar was in a sentimental mood, and inclined to see things from a sentimental point of view.

"It mayn't be botanically true," he said, "but it's a pretty idea all the same;" and then he trolled out in a fine baritone:

> "No, the heart that has truly loved never forgets,
> But as truly loves on to the close;
> As the sunflower turns on her god, when he sets,
> The same look which she turned when he rose."

"What's the use of singing that when you know it isn't true?" cried Daphne contemptuously. "Do you suppose a stiff-necked thing like that, with a stalk a quarter of an inch in diameter, could turn and twist from east to west every day, without wringing its head off? The idea is obviously absurd. What lovely old walnut-trees!"

she exclaimed, looking across the lawn. "Centuries upon centuries old, are they not?"

"I believe they were planted soon after George the Third came to the throne."

"Is that all? They look as old as the Wrekin."

They strolled across the wide lawn, and in among the shadows of the old trees. The cows were moving stealthily about in the meadow on the other side of the fence, as if sleep were the last thing they ever thought of.

"And you really like Hawksyard?" demanded Edgar earnestly.

"Like it! I think it is quite the most delicious place I ever saw. Those high dadoes; these deep-set stone-mullioned windows; those eccentric little bed-rooms; that secret staircase, so sweetly suggestive of murder and treason. The whole place is so thoroughly original."

"It is one of the few moated granges left in England," said Edgar with an air of conscious merit.

"It is quite too lovely."

"Daphne, do you really mean what you say?"

he asked with sudden intensity. "Are you only talking like this to please me—out of kindness?"

"If I have a fault it is a habit of blurting out what I think, without reference to other people's feelings. I am thoroughly in earnest about Hawksyard."

"Then be its mistress," exclaimed Edgar, taking her hand, and trying to draw her towards him; "be queen of my house, darling, as you have long been sovereign of my heart. Make me the happiest man that ever yonder old roof sheltered—the proudest, the most entirely blest. Daphne, I am not poetical, or clever. I can't find many words, but—I love you—I love you."

She laughed in his face, a clear and silvery peal—laughed him to absolute scorn; yet without a touch of ill-nature.

"My dear Edgar, this is too much," she cried. "A few months ago you were fondly, devotedly, irrevocably in love with Lina. Don't you remember how we sympathised that afternoon in the meadows? This is the sunflower over again—first to the sun and then to the moon. No, dear

Edgar, never talk to me of love. I have a real honest regard for you. I respect you. I trust you as my very brother. It would spoil all if you were to persist in talking nonsense of this kind."

She left him, planted there—mute as a statue—frozen with mortification, humiliation, despair.

> He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his deserts are small,
> Who dares not put it to the touch,
> To win or lose it all.

He had tried his fate—hopefully, confidently even—lured on by her deceptive sweetness; and all was lost.

She had run lightly off. She was on the other side of the lawn before he stirred from the attitude in which she left him; his hands clenched, his head bent, his eyes staring stupidly at the gravel walk.

"She does not care a straw for me," he said to himself, "not a straw. And I thought she had grown fond of me. I thought I had but to speak."

A friendly hand touched him lightly on the

shoulder. It was Gerald, the man for whom Fate had reserved all good things—unbounded talents, unbounded wealth, the love of a perfect woman.

"Cheer up, old fellow," said Gerald heartily. "Forgive me if I heard more than you intended me to hear. Mrs. Turchill sent me in quest of you and Daphne, and I came up—just as you——"

"Just as I made an ass of myself," interrupted Edgar. "It doesn't matter. I don't a bit mind your knowing. I have no pride of that kind. I am proud of loving her, even in vain."

"Don't be down-hearted, man. A girl of that kind must be played as an expert angler plays a frisky young salmon. She has refused you to-night; she may accept you three months hence."

"She laughed at me," said Edgar, with deepest despondency.

"It is her disposition to laugh at all things. You must have patience, man; patience and persistence. 'My love is but a lassie yet.' Thy beloved one still delights in the green fields; her tender neck cannot bear the yoke. Wait, and she will turn to thee—as—as the sunflower turns to

the sun," concluded Gerald, having vainly sought a better comparison.

"It doesn't," cried Edgar dejectedly. "That is what we have just been talking about. The sunflower is a stiff-necked impostor."

CHAPTER V.

"NOT FOR YOUR LINAGE, NE FOR YOUR RICHESSE."

THE two young men walked up and down under the walnut-trees for nearly an hour, Gerald Goring playing the unaccustomed part of consoler. He liked Edgar Turchill with an honest liking. There was a shade of condescension, of unconscious patronage, in the feeling; but it was thoroughly sincere. The Saxon squire was of course distinctly on a lower intellectual level than the man of mixed race—the man whose father had thrust himself into the front ranks of life by the sheer force of will and brains, unaided by conventional training of any kind; whose mother had been the last development of a family reared in courts and palaces. Compared

with the quicksilver that flowed in his own veins, Edgar Turchill's blood was a fluid that smacked of the vegetable kingdom—watery stuff such as oozes out of a turnip or a cabbage when the cook-maid cuts it. Yet the man could feel, and so keenly, that Gerald was touched with tender pity.

"Don't be down-hearted, old fellow," he said, walking slowly under the spreading boughs, with his hand resting affectionately upon Turchill's shoulder. "Be sure things will work round in time. She is a pert capricious minx; but she cannot help being fond of you, if you are only patient."

"I would wait for her as Jacob waited for Rachel, if I were as sure of winning her," answered Edgar; "but I am afraid there's no chance. If she detested me; if the very sight of me were odious to her; there might be some hope. But she likes me—she is even fond of me; in a calm sisterly way. If you knew how sweet she was to me in the spring before you came—she had no fits of temper then—when I taught her sculling; how

she used to boil a kettle down in the boat-house and——"

"Yes; it was awfully nice of her," interjected Gerald somewhat impatiently, having heard the story of these boat-house breakfasts several times before.

"If she were less kind I should have more hope," pursued Edgar. "I think I shall go away —out of the country—where I shall never see her lovely face. I have a great mind to go to India and shoot big game."

"And stick pigs?—a curious cure for the heart-ache. No, old fellow; stay at home and bide your time. That's your game."

"I could never look her in the face after to-night," said Edgar.

"Nonsense, man! Treat this capricious minx as coolly as if nothing had ever been said about love and despair. Let her think to-night's avowal the consequence of too much wine—a mere after-dinner outburst of sentiment. Look her in the face, forsooth! If you are a wise man, you may make her ashamed to look you in the face before

she is six months older. You have spoilt her by your flatteries and foolings and compliances. Give her a little of the rough side of your bark. She professes to care for you as a brother, quotha! Treat her with brotherly discourtesy—brotherly indifference. Be as candid about her faults and follies as if you were her very brother. When she finds you can live without her she will begin to languish for the old adulation."

"I love her too well to be such a Jesuit," said Edgar.

"Pshaw! do you suppose Petruchio did not love Kate? He knew there was but one way of taming his fair shrew, and he used the wisdom Heaven had given him."

"I couldn't act a part where she is concerned," argued Edgar. "She would find me out in a moment."

They talked for a long time upon the same subject, wearing the theme threadbare; travelling backwards and forwards over the same line of argument, while the moon climbed higher and higher in the cloudless blue; and in the end Edgar acknow-

ledged that it would be a foolish thing to leave his farm before the harvest was all in; or his mother, before she had enjoyed her annual fortnight at the sea-side; or to uproot himself violently from his native soil in the vain hope of curing his heart-wound. He had tried foreign air for his malady before, and foreign air had done nothing for him; and this time he believed the wound to be ever so much deeper. A lifetime in a strange country would hardly heal it.

At last Edgar consented to be led despondently back to the house, which he had left a little while ago with his heart beating high, full of hope and delight. They found the three ladies seated in the quaint old drawing-room, dimly lighted by a dozen or so of candles in the silver sconces against the wall. There was nothing so distinctly modern as a moderator-lamp at Hawksyard.

Mrs. Turchill was enlarging mildly in a lowered voice upon the various shortcomings of her servants, who, although old servants and infinitely better than other people's, were yet so far human in their faultiness as to afford food for conversation.

Madoline was listening with polite interest, throwing in an encouraging word now and then, which was hardly needed, for Mrs. Turchill's monologue would have gone on just the same without it. Daphne, exhausted by a long day's vivacity, had fallen asleep, bolt erect in a straight-backed cherry-wood chair.

Gerald Goring remembered that day at Fontainebleau when he had told himself that Daphne asleep would be a very common-place young person; yet, as he looked at her to-night, he was fain to own that even in slumber she was lovely. Was it some trick of candlelight and shadow which gave such piquancy to the delicate features, which gave such expression to the dark-pencilled brows and drooping eyelids? The bright hair, the pale yellow gown, the exquisite fairness of the complexion, gave a lily-like loveliness to the whole figure. So pale; so pure; so little earthly.

"Poor Edgar!" sighed Mr. Goring. "He is very much to be pitied. How desperately I could have loved such a girl, if I had not already adored her opposite. And how I would have made her

love me," he added, remembering all their foolish talk, and how easy it had seemed to him to play upon that sensitive nature.

"I am afraid the tea is cold," said Mrs. Turchill. "You gentlemen have been enjoying your cigars in the walnut walk, I suppose."

The clatter of cups and saucers startled Daphne. She opened her eyes, and saw Edgar looking at her with piteous reproachfulness. She could calmly sleep just after giving him his death-wound. There was a refinement of cruelty in such indifference. Then he suddenly remembered Gerald's advice, and tried to seem equally at his ease.

"I'll wager mother has been bemoaning the vices of the new dairymaid, and the ingratitude of the old one in going away to be married," said he. "That's what sent you to sleep, wasn't it, Daphne?"

"I was tired. We had such a long afternoon," she answered wearily.

"The carriage has been waiting half an hour," said Madoline. "I think we had better put on our hats, and then say good-night."

"Mr. Goring will drive home with you, of course," said Mrs. Turchill.

"Yes; I am going to see them safe home, Mrs. Turchill," answered Gerald. "I am to stay at South Hill to-night, and hear Sir Vernon's account of the Yeomanry dinner."

Edgar, who had just been talking of eternal banishment, was longing to ask for the fourth seat in the landau. The walk home between midnight and morning would be delightful.

"I should have liked to hear about the dinner," he began dubiously; and then meeting Gerald's eye, quailed beneath its friendly ridicule, and said no more.

He escorted Daphne to the carriage, helped to arrange her wraps with a steady hand, though his heart beat passionately all the time; and bade her good-night in so thoroughly cheery a voice, that she wondered a little to find how easily he had taken her rejection of him.

"Poor dear Edgar!" she said to herself as they drove along the shadowy Warwickshire lane, through the calm beauty of the summer night,

"I daresay it was only an impulse of the moment —or perhaps it was the moon—that made him propose to me. Yet he seemed awfully in earnest, and I was afraid I might have offended him by laughing. But, after being devoted to Lina, and making me the confidante of his grief, it was certainly rather impertinent to offer himself to me. But he is a dear good-natured creature all the same, and I should be sorry to offend him."

She was silent all the way home; sitting in her comfortable corner of the carriage, wrapped to her chin in her soft white shawl, to all appearance asleep. Yet not once did her senses lose themselves in slumber. She was listening to the happy lovers, as they talked of the past—that part of the past which they had spent asunder. Gerald had been talking of a long mule-ride in Switzerland under just such a moonlit sky. It was no tremendous mountain ascent, only a ride from Evian up to a village at the foot of the Dent d'Oche, to look down upon Lake Leman and its lovely shores bathed in moonlight; the long dark range of the

Jura rising like a wall on the western side; picturesque villages on the banks gleaming in the silver light, with their old church towers half hidden by masses of dark foliage; one lonely boat with its twin sails skimming like a swallow across the moonlit water.

"It must have been delicious," said Lina.

"It was very nice—except that you were not there. 'But one thing want these banks of Rhine.'"

"And did you really miss me at such moments, Gerald? When you were looking at some especially lovely scene, had you really and truly a feeling that I ought to have been by your side?"

"Really and truly; the better half of myself was missing. Pleasure was only a one-sided affair, as that moon will appear next week—an uncomfortable-looking, fragmentary kind of planet."

"I love to hear of your travels, Gerald," said Lina softly. "Have you told me all about them, do you think?"

"All that's worth telling, I fancy," he answered

lightly, with an involuntary glance at Daphne to see if she were really asleep.

There was no quiver of the dark lashes, no movement in the restful figure. Her face had that pale unearthly look which all faces have in the moonlight. A pain shot through his heart as he thought that it was thus she would look in death. It was one of those involuntary flashes of thought which sometimes flit across a mind unacquainted with actual sorrow—the phantom of a grief that might be.

When they arrived at South Hill Daphne wished her sister and Mr. Goring a brief good-night, and went straight to her room. She had no motive for awaiting her father's home-coming. He would have nothing to say to her. His only greeting would be a look which seemed to ask what business she had there. It was on the stroke of eleven. Madoline and Gerald walked up and down the gravel drive in front of the house, waiting for the carriage from Warwick; and during this interval Mr. Goring told his sweetheart how Edgar Turchill had been rejected by Daphne. Madoline was

deeply distressed by this news. She had made up her mind that her sister's life was to be made happy in this particular way. She had imagined a fair and peaceful future in which she would be living at the Abbey, and Daphne at Hawksyard —not a dozen miles apart. And now this wilful Daphne had rejected the moated grange and its owner, and that fair picture of the future had no more reality in it than a mirage city seen from the dreary sands of a desert.

"I thought she was attached to him," said Madoline, when she had been told the whole story. "She has encouraged him to come here; she has always seemed happy in his company. Half her life, since she came from school, has been spent with him."

"In sober earnest, darling, I'm afraid this fascinating little sister of yours is an arrant coquette. She has flirted with Edgar because there was no one else to flirt with."

"Please don't say that, Gerald, for I know you are mistaken," answered Madoline eagerly. "Daphne is no flirt. She looks upon Edgar as

a kind of adopted brother. I have always known that, but I fancied that this friendly trustful feeling of hers would lead in time to a warmer attachment. As to coquetry, she does not know what it means. She is thoroughly childlike and innocent."

"Possibly, dearest. Yet in her childishness she knows how to fool a man as thoroughly as Ninon de l'Enclos could have done after half a century's practice. However, I hope Edgar will stand his ground and bring this wayward puss to her senses."

"I cannot understand how she can help liking him," mused Madoline. "He is so good, so frank, and brave, and true."

"All noble qualities, and deserving a woman's affection. Yet the sentimental history of the human race tends to show that a man endowed with all those virtues is not the most dangerous to the fair sex."

"Gerald," said Lina, "I have an idea that pride is at the bottom of Daphne's refusal."

"Why pride? What kind of pride?"

"She has harped a good deal, at different times, upon her penniless position; has called herself a pauper, half in joke, half in earnest, but with a bitterness of tone that wounded me. She may think that as Edgar is well off, and she has no fortune, she ought not to accept him."

"My dearest love, what an utterly quixotic idea! The only thought a pretty young woman ever has about a man's wealth is that when she shall be his wife she can have more frocks than the common run of women. There is no sense of obligation. She is so conscious of the boon she bestows that she accepts his filthy lucre as a matter of course."

"I don't think that would be Daphne's way of thinking."

"Dearest, if she were wholly your sister I should say not. But as she is only your half-sister, I can suppose her only about half as good again as the ruck of womankind."

"You are very rich, are you not, Gerald?"

"Well, yes; it would take a large amount of idiocy on my part to spoil the income my father

left me. It might be done, no doubt, if I went into the right circles. My ruin would be only a question of so many years and so many racehorses. But while I live as I am living now, there is very little chance of my becoming acquainted with want."

"I know, dear; and I don't think it was for the sake of my fortune you chose me, was it, Gerald?"

"My dearest love, I only wish some old nurse would turn up on your wedding morning and tell you that you are not the Lady Clare, so that I might prove to you how little wealth or position influenced my choice. I think I know what you are going to say, Lina. As I have more money than you and I together—indulge our caprices as we may—are ever likely to spend, why not give your fortune to Daphne?"

"Dear Gerald, how good of you to guess my wish! I should like to divide my fortune with my sister when I come of age. I don't want to give her all, for half would be ample. And I am so accustomed to the idea of independence, that I

should hardly like to be a pensioner even upon you. Will you speak to the lawyers, Gerald, and find out how the gift had better be made?"

"Yes, dear; I'll settle everything with the men of law. It seems to me that you can do just what you like, as soon as you come of age. But you'll have to wait till then."

"Only ascertain that it can be done, Gerald, and then I can tell Daphne, and she will no longer fancy herself a pauper. It may influence her in her conduct to Edgar."

"It may," answered Gerald dubiously; "but somehow I don't think it will. Edgar must win the game off his own bat."

The sisters were alone together in Madoline's morning-room after breakfast next day. Gerald had gone to the Abbey to look after the builders, and settle various matters with his steward. Daphne was sitting half in and half out of the balcony, idle as was natural to her, but listless and discontented-looking, which was a state of mind she did not often exhibit.

There was no Edgar this morning, and she missed her faithful slave.

Perhaps he meant never to come to South Hill any more; in which case it would be difficult for her to get rid of her life.

"Daphne," began Madoline gravely, "I have heard something which has made me very unhappy; which has altogether surprised and disappointed me. I am told that Edgar proposed to you last night, and that you refused him."

"Did he send you the news in a telegram?" asked Daphne, flaming red. "I don't see how else you could have heard it."

"No matter how I heard it, dear. It is the truth, I suppose."

"Yes; it is the truth. But I despise him for telling you," answered Daphne angrily.

"It was not he who told me. It was Gerald, who by accident overheard the end of your conversation with Edgar, and who——"

"What! he has been interfering, has he?" cried Daphne, looking still more angry. "It is

supremely impertinent of him to busy himself about my affairs."

"Daphne! Is that the way you speak of my future husband—your future brother?"

"He has no right to dictate whom I am to accept or reject. What can it matter to him?"

"He does not presume to dictate: but it does matter a great deal to him that my sister should choose the path in life which is most likely to lead to happiness."

"How can he tell which path will lead me to happiness? Does he suppose that I am going to have a husband chosen for me—as if I were a wretched French girl educated in a convent?"

"He thought—just as I thought—that you could hardly help liking such a thoroughly good fellow as Edgar; a man so devoted to you; so unselfish; such a good son."

"What have I to do with his virtues? I don't care a straw for him, except as a friendly sort of creature who will do anything I ask him, and who is very nice to play tennis or billiards with. He ought not to be offended at my refusing him.

It would have been all the same had he been anyone else. I shall never marry."

"But why not, Daphne?"

"Oh, for no particular reason: except perhaps that I am too fond of my own way, and shouldn't like a master."

"Daphne, there is something in your tone that alarms me. It is so unnatural in a girl of your age. While you were at Asnières, did you ever see anyone—you were such a child, that it seems foolish to ask such a question—but was there anyone at Asnières whom——"

"Whom I fell in love with? No, dearest, there was no one at Asnières. Madame Tolmache was most judicious in her selection of masters. I don't think the most romantic school-girl, fed upon three-volume novels, could have fancied herself in love even with the best-looking of them."

"I can't make you out, Daphne. Yet I think you might be very happy as Edgar Turchill's wife. It would be so nice for us to be living in the same county, within a few miles of each other."

"Yes, that would be nice; and it would be nicer to be at Hawksyard than to stay at South Hill when you are gone. Yet you see I have too much self-respect to perjure myself, and pretend to return poor Edgar's affection."

"I have been thinking, Daphne, that perhaps some sense of mistaken pride may stand between you and Edgar."

And then, falteringly, ashamed of her own generosity, Madoline told her sister how she meant to divide her fortune.

"What!" cried Daphne, turning pale; "take his money? Not a sixpence. Never speak of it —never think of such a thing again."

"Whose money, dear? It is mine, and mine alone. I have the right to do what I like with it."

"Would you dispose of it without asking Mr. Goring's leave—without consulting him?"

"Hardly, because I love him too well to take any step in life without asking his advice—without confiding fully in him. But he goes with me in this heart and soul, Daphne; he most thoroughly approves my plan."

"You are very good—he is very generous—but I will never consent to accept sixpence out of your fortune. You may be as generous to me as you like—as you have always been, darling. You may give me gloves and frocks and pocket-money, while you are Miss Lawford: but to rob you of your rights; to lessen your importance as Mrs. Goring; to feel myself under an obligation to your husband—not for all this wide world. Not if money could make me happy—which it could not," she added with a stifled sob.

"Daphne, are you not happy?" questioned Lina, looking at her with sudden distress. "My bright one, I thought your life here was all gladness and pleasure. You have seemed so happy with Edgar, so thoroughly at your ease with him, that I fancied you must be fond of him."

"Should I be thoroughly at my ease with a man I loved, unless—unless our attachment were an old story—a settled business—like yours and Mr. Goring's?"

"Why will you persist in calling him Mr. Goring?"

"Oh, he is such a grand personage—the owner of an abbey, with cloisters, and half a mile of hot-houses—I could not bring myself to call him by his christian-name."

"As if the abbey and the hot-houses made any difference! Well, darling, I am not going to worry you about poor Edgar. You must choose your own way of being happy. I would not for all the world that you should marry a man you did not love; but I should have been so glad if you could have loved Edgar. And I think, dear, that unintentionally—unconsciously even—you have done him a wrong. You have led him to believe you like him."

"And so I do like him, better than anyone in the world—after my own flesh and blood."

"Yes, dear. But he has been led to hope something more than that. I fear he will feel his disappointment keenly."

"Nonsense, Lina. Don't you know that six months ago he was still suffering from his disappointment about you; and now you imagine he is going to break his heart for me. A heart

so easily transferred cannot be easily broken. It is a portable article. No doubt he will carry it somewhere else."

She kissed her sister and ran out of the room, leaving Madoline anxious and perplexed, yet not the less resolved to endow Daphne with half her wealth as soon as she came of age.

"Providence never intended that two sisters should be so unequally circumstanced," she said to herself. "Willy-nilly, Daphne must accept what I am determined to give her. The lawyers will find out a way."

CHAPTER VI.

"NO MAN MAY ALWAY HAVE PROSPERITEE."

Edgar Turchill did not go to the other end of the world to hide his grief and mortification at this second overthrow of his fondest hopes. He absented himself from South Hill for nearly a month, yet so contrived as that his absence should not appear the result of pride or anger. Mrs. Turchill's annual sea-side holiday was as much an institution as the opening of Parliament, or the Derby: and she expected on all such occasions to be escorted and accompanied by her only son. She liked a fashionable watering-place, where there was a well-dressed crowd to be seen on parade or pier; she required to have her leisure

enlivened by a good brass band; and she would accept nothing less in the way of lodgings than an airy bay-windowed drawing-room in the very best part of the sea front.

"If I am not to come to the sea-side comfortably I would rather stay at home," she said to her confidante Rebecca; an axiom which Rebecca received as respectfully as if it had been Holy Writ.

"Of course, mum. Why should you come away from Hawksyard to be cramped or moped?" said Rebecca. "You've all you can wish for there."

Such murmurings as these had arisen when Edgar, sick to death of Brighton and Eastbourne, Scarborough and Torquay, had tempted his mother to visit some more romantic and less civilised shore; where the accommodation was of the rough-and-ready order, and where there was neither parade nor pier for the exhibition of fine clothes to the music of brazen bands. For picturesque scenery Mrs. Turchill cared not a jot. All wild and rugged coasts she denounced sweepingly, as dangerous to life and limb, and therefore

to be avoided. The wildest bit of scenery she could tolerate was Beachy Head; and even that grassy height she deemed objectionable. Nor did she appreciate any watering-place which could not boast a smart array of shop-windows. She liked to be tempted by trumpery modern Dresden; or to have her love of colour gratified by the latest invention in bonnets and parasols. She liked a circulating library of the old-fashioned, Miss Burney type; where she could dawdle away an hour looking at new books and papers, soothed by the sympathetic strains of a musical-box. She liked to have her son well-dressed and in a top-hat, in attendance upon her during her afternoon drive in the local fly, along a smooth chalky high-road leading to nowhere in particular. She liked to attend local concerts, or to hear Miss Snevillici, the renowned Shakespearian elocutionist, read the Trial Scene in the "Merchant of Venice," followed by Tennyson's "Queen of the May."

To poor Edgar this sea-side holiday seemed always a foretaste of purgatory. It was ever so much worse than the fortnight's hard labour in

London, for in the big city there were sights worth seeing; while here, at the stereotyped watering-place, life was one dismal round of genteel inactivity.

But this year Edgar was seized with a sudden desire to hasten the annual expedition.

"Mother, I think this lovely weather must break up before long," he said briskly, with a laborious affectation of cheerfulness, as he sat at dinner with his parent on the day after Daphne's cruelty. "What should you say to our starting for the sea-side to-morrow?"

"To-morrow! My dear Edgar, that would be quite impossible. I shall want a week for packing."

"A week! Surely Rebecca could put your things into a portmanteau in six hours as easily as in six days."

"You don't know what you are talking about, my dear. A lady's wardrobe is so different from a man's. All my gowns will want looking over carefully before they are packed. And I must have Miss Piper over from Warwick to do some alterations for me. The fashions change so quickly

nowadays. And some of my laces will have to be washed. And I am not sure that I shall not have to drive over to Leamington and order a bonnet. I should not like to disgrace you by appearing on the parade with a dowdy bonnet."

Edgar sighed. He would have liked to go to some wild Welsh or Scottish coast, far from beaten tracks. He would have liked some sea-side village in the south of Ireland—Dunmore, or Tramore, or Kilkee; some quiet retreat nestled in a hollow of the cliffs, where as yet never brass band nor fashionable gowns had come; a place to which people came for pure love of fine air and grand scenery, and not to show off their clothes or advertise their easy circumstances. But he knew that if he took his mother to such a place she would be miserable; so he held his peace.

"Where would you like to go this year?" he said presently.

"Well, I have been considering that point, Edgar. Let me see now. We went to Brighton last year——"

"Yes," sighed Edgar, remembering what a

tread-mill business the lawn had seemed to him; how ineffably tiresome the Aquarium; how monotonous the shops in the King's Road, and the entertainments at the Pavilion.

"And to Scarborough the year before."

"Yes," with a still wearier sigh.

"And the year before that to Eastbourne; and the year before that to Torquay. Don't you think we might go to Torquay again this year? I hear it is very much improved."

"Very much built upon, I suppose you mean, mother. More smoky chimneys, more hotels, more churches, longer streets. I should think, judging by what it had come to when we saw it, that by this time Torquay must be a very good imitation of Bayswater. However, if you like Torquay——"

"It is one of the few places I do like."

"Then let it be Torquay, by all means. I'll tell you what I'll do, mother. I'll run down to Torquay to-morrow, find some nice lodgings for you—I think by this time I know exactly what you want in that way—and engage them for any day you like to name."

"That's very kind of you, Edgar. But be sure you get some reference as to the landlady's character, so that you may be certain there has been no fever case in the house during the last twelvemonth. And it would be as well to get a local architect to look at the drains. It would be a guinea well spent."

"All right, mother; I'll do anything you like. I am longing for a blow of sea-air."

"But it will be at least a week before I can come. What will you do with yourself in the meantime?"

"Oh, I shall contrive to amuse myself somehow. I might go on to Dartmouth, and charter a boat, and go up the Dart. I want very much to see the Dart. Only say on what day I may expect you at Torquay."

"Am I to travel alone, Edgar?"

"You'll have Rebecca. And the journey won't be difficult. You'll join the express at Swindon, don't you know——"

"If you think I can trust to Rebecca's care of

the luggage," said Mrs. Turchill dubiously. "She's very steady."

"Steady! Well she ought to be at her age. You've only to get the luggage labelled, you see, mother——"

"I never trust to that," answered the matron solemnly. "I like Rebecca to get out at every station where the train stops, and see with her own eyes that my luggage is in the van. Railway people are so stupid."

Edgar did not envy Rebecca. Having thus adroitly planned an immediate departure he was off soon after daybreak next morning, and arrived at Torquay in time for dinner. He perambulated the loneliest places he could find all the evening, brooding over his disappointment, and wondering if there were any foundation for Gerald Goring's idea that Daphne was to be won by him even yet. He slept at The Imperial, and devoted the next morning to lodging-hunting; till his soul sickened at the very sight of the inevitable housemaid, who can't answer the most general inquiry—not so far

as to say how many bedrooms there are in the house, without reference to the higher powers—and the inevitable landlady, who cannot make up her mind about the rent till she has asked how many there are in family, and whether late dinners will be required. Before sundown, however, after ascending innumerable flights of stairs, and looking into a dismal series of newly-furnished rooms, he found a suite of apartments which he believed would satisfy his mother and Rebecca; and having engaged the same for a period of three weeks, he went down to the water's edge, to a spot where boating men most did congregate, and there negotiated the hire of a rakish little yawl, just big enough to be safe in a summer sea. In this light craft he was to sail at six o'clock next morning with a man and a boy.

"How Daphne would enjoy knocking about this lovely coast in just such a boat!" he thought. "If she were my wife, I would buy her as pretty a yacht as any lady could desire, and she and I would sail half round the world together. She must be tired of the Avon, poor child."

Daphne was very tired of the Avon. Never had the days of her life seemed longer or drearier than they seemed to her just now, when her faithful slave Edgar was no longer at hand to minister to her caprices. A strange stillness seemed to have fallen upon South Hill. Sir Vernon was laid up with that suppressed gout which Daphne fancied was only another name for unsuppressed ill-temper, so closely did the two complaints seem allied. At such times Madoline was more than ever necessary to his well-being. She sat with him in the library; she read to him; she wrote his letters; and was in all things verily his right hand. The most pure and perfect filial love sweetened an office which would have seemed hard to an ungrateful or cold-hearted daughter. Yet in the close retirement of the stern-looking businesslike chamber, with its prim bookshelves and standard literature—not a book which every decently-read student does not know from cover to cover—she could but remember the bright summer days that were done; the aimless wanderings in meadow and wood; the drives to Goring Abbey;

the tea-drinkings in the cloisters or in the gardens; the happy season which was gone. The knowledge that this one happy summer, the first she and Gerald had ever spent together as engaged lovers, was ended and over, made her feel as if some part of her own youth had gone with it—something which could never come again. It had been such an utterly happy period; such peerless weather; such a fair gladsome earth, teeming with all good things—even the farmers ceasing to grumble, and owning that, for once in a way, there was hope of a prosperous harvest. And now it was over; the corn was reaped, and sportsmen were tramping over the stubble; the plough-horses were creeping slowly across the hill; the sun was beginning to decline soon after five-o'clock tea; breathings of approaching winter sharpened the sweet morning breezes; autumnal mists veiled the meadows at eventide.

Gerald Goring had gone to Scotland to shoot grouse. It seemed to Daphne, prowling about gardens and meadows with Goldie in a purposeless manner that was the essence of idleness, as if the

summer had gone in a breath. Yesterday she was here, that glorious, radiant, disembodied goddess we call Summer—yesterday she was here, and all the lanes were sweetened with lime-blossoms, and the roses were being wasted with prodigal profusion, and the river ran liquid gold; and to sit on a sunny bank was to be steeped in warm delight. To-day there were only stiff-looking dahlias, and variegated foliage, and mouse-coloured plants, and house-leek borders, in the gardens where the roses had been; and to sit on a grassy bank was to shiver or to sneeze. The river had a dismal look. There had been heavy rains within the last few days, and the willowy banks were hidden under dull mud-coloured water. There was no more pleasure in boating.

"You may oil her, or varnish her, or do anything that is proper to be done with her before you put her away for the winter, Bink," Daphne said to her faithful attendant; "I shan't row any more this year."

"Lor, miss, we may have plenty more fine days yet."

"I don't care for that. I am tired of rowing. Perhaps I may never row again."

She went in to luncheon yawning, and looking much more tired than Madoline, who had been writing letters for her father all the morning.

"I wish I were a hunting young woman, Lina," she said.

"Why, dear?"

"Because I should have something to look forward to in the winter."

"If you could only employ yourself more indoors, Daphne."

"Do I not employ myself indoors? Why, I play billiards for hours at a stretch when I have anyone to play with. I practised out-of-the-way strokes for an hour and a half this morning."

"I am sure, dear, you would be happier if you had some more feminine amusements; if you were to go on with your water-colour painting, for instance. Gerald could give you a little instruction when he is here. He paints beautifully. I'm sure he would be pleased to help you."

"No, dear; I have no talent. I like beginning

a sketch; but directly it begins to look horrid I lose patience; and then I begin to lay on colour in a desperate way, till the whole thing is the most execrable daub imaginable; and then I get into a rage and tear it into a thousand bits. It's just the same with my needlework; there always comes a time when I get my thread entangled, and begin to pucker, and the whole business goes wrong. I have no patience. I shall never finish anything. I shall never achieve anything. I am an absolute failure."

"Daphne, if you only knew how it pains me to hear you talk of yourself like that——"

"Then I won't do it again. I would not pain you for the wealth of this world—not even to have it always summer, instead of a dull, abominable, shivery season like this."

"Gerald says it is lovely in Argyleshire; balmy and warm; almost too hot for walking over the hills."

"He is enjoying himself, I suppose," said Daphne coldly.

"Yes; he is having capital sport."

"Shooting those birds that make our dining-room smell so nasty every evening, and helping to stock Aunt Rhoda's larder."

"He does not intend to stay after the end of this month. He will be home early in October."

Daphne did not even affect to be interested. She was feeding Goldie, who was allowed to come in to luncheon when Sir Vernon was not in the way.

"I had a letter from Mrs. Turchill this morning," said Lina; "she is enjoying herself immensely at Torquay. Edgar is very attentive and devoted to her, going everywhere with her. He is a most affectionate son."

"And a good son makes a good husband, doesn't he, Lina? Is that idea at the bottom of your mind when you talk of his goodness to his very commonplace mother?"

"I don't want to talk of him, Daphne, to anyone who values him so little as you do."

"But I value him very much—almost as much as I do Goldie—but not quite, not quite, my pet," she added reassuringly to the dog, lest he should be jealous. "I have missed him horribly; no one

to tease, no one to talk nonsense with. You are so sensible that I could not afford to shock you by my absurdities; and Mr. Goring is so cynical that I fancy he is always laughing. I miss Edgar every hour of the day."

"And yet——"

"And yet I don't care one little straw for him —in the kind of way you care for Mr. Goring," said Daphne with a sudden blush.

Lina sighed and was silent. She had not abandoned all hope that Daphne would in time grow more warmly attached to the faithful swain, whose society she evidently missed sorely in these dull autumnal days, during which the only possible excitement was a box of new books from Mudie's.

"More 'Voyages to the North Pole'; more 'Three Weeks on the Top of the Biggest Pyramid'; more 'Memoirs of Philip of Macedon's Private Secretary,'" cried Daphne, sitting on the ground beside the newly-arrived box, and tossing all the instructive books on the carpet, after a contemptuous glance at their titles. "Here is Browning's new poem, thank goodness! and a novel, 'My Only Jo.' Told in the

first person and present tense, no doubt; nice and light and lively. I think I'll take that and Browning, if you don't mind, Lina; and you shall have all the Travels and Memoirs."

With the help of novels and poetry, and long rambles even in the wild showery weather, waterproofed and booted against the storm, and wearing a neat little felt wide-awake which weather could not spoil, Daphne contrived to get through her life somehow while her faithful slave was away. Was it indeed he whom she missed so sorely? Was it his footfall which her ear knew so well; his step which quickened the beating of her heart, and brought the warm blood to her cheek? Was it his coming and going which so deeply stirred the current of her life? Life had been empty of delight for the last three weeks; but was it Edgar's absence made the little world of South Hill so blank and dreary? In her heart of hearts Daphne knew too well that it was not. Yet Edgar had made an important element in her life. He had helped her, if not to forget, at least to banish thought. He had sympathised with all her frivolous

pleasures, and made it easier for her to take life lightly.

"If I were once to be serious I should break my heart," she said to herself, as she sat curled up on the fluffy white rug by one of the morning-room windows, her thoughts straying off from "My Only Jo," which was the most frothy of fashionable novels.

Mrs. Turchill was so delighted with Torquay, in its increased towniness and shoppiness, its interesting Ritualistic services, at which it was agreeable to assist once in a way, however a well-regulated mind might disapprove all such Papistical innovations, that October had begun before she and her son returned to Hawksyard. Edgar had been glad to stay away. He shrank with a strange shyness from meeting Daphne; albeit he was always longing for her as the hart for water-brooks. He amused himself knocking about in his little yawl-rigged yacht, thinking of the girl he loved. Mrs. Turchill complained that he had grown selfish and inattentive. He rarely walked with her on the parade; he refused to listen to the town band; he

went reluctantly to hear Miss Snevillici; and slumbered in his too-conspicuous front seat while that lady declaimed the Balcony Scene from "Romeo and Juliet."

"If it were not for Rebecca I should feel horribly lonely," complained Mrs. Turchill. "And it is not right that I should be dependent upon a servant for society."

Gerald had not yet returned. He had gone on a yachting expedition with an old college chum. He was enjoying the wild free life, and his letters to Madoline were full of fun and high spirits.

"Next year we shall be here together, perhaps," he wrote. "I think you would like the fun. It would be so new to you after the placid pleasures of South Hill. And what a yacht we would have! This I am now upon is a mere cockle-shell to the ship I would build for my dear love. There should be room enough for you and all your pets—Fluff and the squirrel, your books, your piano, and for Daphne, too, if she would like to come; only she is such a wild young person that I should live in constant fear of her falling overboard."

Madoline read this passage to Daphne laughingly. "You see that he remembers you, dear. The thought of you enters into his plans for the future."

"He is very kind: I am much obliged to him," Daphne answered icily.

It was not the first time she had responded coldly to Madoline's mention of her lover. Her sister felt the slight against her idol, and was deeply wounded.

"Daphne," she said in a voice that was faintly tremulous in spite of her effort to be calm, "you have said many little things lately—or perhaps it is hardly what you have said, but only your looks and tones—which make me think that you dislike Gerald."

"Dislike him! No, that is impossible. He has all the attributes which make people admired and liked."

"Yet I don't think you like him."

"It is not in my nature to like many people. I like Edgar. I love you, with all my heart and soul. Be content with that, darling," said Daphne, kneeling by Madoline's side, resting the bright

head, with its soft silken hair, on her shoulder—the face looking downward and half hidden.

"No; I cannot be content. I made up my mind that Gerald was to be as dear to you as a brother—as dear as the brother you lost might have been, had God spared him and made him all we could wish. And now you set up some barrier of false pride against him."

"I don't know about false pride. I can hardly be very fond of a man who ridicules me, and treats me like a child, or a plaything. Affection will scarcely thrive in an atmosphere of contempt."

"Contempt! Why, Daphne, what can have put such an idea into your head? Gerald likes and admires you. If you knew how he praises your beauty, your fascinating ways! You would not have him praise you to your face, would you? My pet, I should be sorry to see you spoiled by adulation."

"Do you suppose I want praise or flattery?" cried Daphne angrily. "I want to be respected. I want to be treated like a woman, not a child.

I—— Forgive me, Lina dearest. I daresay I am disagreeable and ill-tempered."

"Only believe the truth, dear. Gerald has no thought of you that is not tender and flattering. If he teases you a little now and then it is only as a brother might tease you. He wishes you to think of him in every way as a brother. It always wounds me when you call him Mr. Goring."

"I shall never call him anything else," said Daphne sullenly.

"And if you do not marry as soon as I do——"

"I shall never marry——"

"Dearest, forgive me for not believing that. If you are not married next year you will have a second home at the Abbey. Gerald and I have chosen the rooms we intend for you; the dearest little boudoir over the porch, with an oriel window, just such a room as will delight you."

"You are all that is good: but I don't suppose I shall be able often to take advantage of your kindness. When you are married it will be my duty to dance attendance upon papa, and to try and make him like me. I don't suppose I shall

ever succeed, but I mean to make the effort, however unpleasant it may be to both of us."

"My sweet one, you are sure to win his love. Who could help loving you?"

"My father has helped it all this time," answered Daphne, still moody and with downcast eyes.

Edgar and his mother stayed away till the third week in September. When they came back to Hawksyard cub-hunting was in full swing, and Mr. Turchill rose at five o'clock three mornings a week to ride to the kennels. He rode with two sets of hounds, making nothing of distance. He bought himself a fifth hunter—having four good ones already—which was naturally supposed to overtop all the rest in strength, pace, and beauty. His mother began to fear that the stables would be her son's ruin.

"Three thousand a-year was considered a large income when your father and I were married," she said; "but it is a mere pittance now for a

country gentleman in your position. We ought to be careful, Edgar."

"Who said we were going to be careless, mother mine? I am sure you are a model among housewives," said Edgar lightly.

"You've taken on a new man in the stable, I hear, Edgar—to attend to your new horse, I suppose."

"Only a new boy at fourteen bob a week, mother. We were rather short-handed."

"Short-handed! With four men!"

Edgar could not stop to debate the matter. It was nine o'clock, and he was eating a hurried breakfast before starting on his useful covert hack for Snitterfield, where the hounds were to meet. It was to be the first meet of the season, an occasion for some excitement. Pleasant to see all the old company, with a new face or two perhaps among them, and a sprinkling of new horses—young ones whose education had only just begun. Edgar was going to exhibit his new mare, an almost thorough-bred black, and was all aglow with pride at the thought of the admiration she

would receive. He looked his best in his well-worn red coat, new buckskins, and mahogany tops.

"I hope you'll be careful, Edgar," said his mother, hanging about him in the hall, "and that you won't go taking desperate jumps with that new mare. She has a nasty vicious look in her hind legs; and yesterday, when I opened the stable-door to speak to Baker, she put back her ears."

"A horse may do that without being an absolute fiend, mother. Black Pearl is the kindest creature in Christendom. Good-bye."

"Dinner at eight, I suppose," sighed Mrs. Turchill, who preferred an earlier hour.

"Yes, if you don't mind. It gives me plenty of time for a bath. Ta, ta."

He had swung himself on to the thick-set chestnut roadster, and was trotting merrily away on the other side of the drawbridge, before his mother had finished her regretful sigh. The groom had gone on before with Black Pearl. These hunting mornings were the only occasions on which Mr. Turchill forgot his disappointment.

The keen delight of fresh air, a fast run, pleasant company, familiar voices, brushed away all dark thoughts. For the moment he lived only to fly across the level fields, in a country which seemed altogether changed from the scene of his daily walks and rides; all familiar things—hedges, hills, commons, brooks—taking a look of newness, as if he were galloping through a newly-invented world. For the moment he lived as the bird lives—a thing of life and motion, a creature too swift for thought or pain or care. Then, after the day's hard riding, came the lazy homeward walk side by side with a friend, and friendly talk about horses and dogs and neighbours. Then a dinner for which even a lover's appetite showed no sign of decay. Then pleasant exhaustion; a cigar; a nap; and a long night of dreamless rest.

No doubt it was this relief afforded by the hunting season which saved Mr. Turchill from exhibiting himself in the dejected condition which Rosalind declared to be an essential mark of a lover. No lean cheek or sunken eye, neglected beard or sullen spirit, marked Edgar when he came

to South Hill. He seemed so much at his ease, and had so much to tell about that first meet at Snitterfield, and the delightful run which followed it, that Daphne was confirmed in her idea that in affairs of the heart Mr. Turchill belonged to the weathercock species.

"If he could get over your rejection of him, you may suppose how easily he would get over mine," she said to her sister.

Yet she was very glad to have Edgar back again: to be able to order him about, to beat him at billiards, or waltz with him in the dusky hall between five-o'clock tea and the dressing-bell, while Lina played for them in the morning-room. In this one accomplishment Daphne was teacher, and a most imperious mistress.

"If you expect me to be seen dancing with you at the Hunt Ball, you must improve vastly between this and January," she said.

CHAPTER VII.

"AND IN MY HERTE WONDREN I BEGAN."

For a man to waltz in the gloaming with a girl whom he passionately loves, and who has contemptuously rejected him, is a kind of pleasure too near the edge of pain to be altogether blissful. Yet Edgar came every non-hunting day to South Hill, and was always ready to dance to Daphne's piping. He was her first partner since the little crabbed old French master at Asnières, who had taken a few turns with her now and then, fiddling all the time, in order to show his other pupils what dancing meant. He declared that Daphne was the only one of them all who had the soul of a dancer.

"*Elle est née sylphide.* She moves in harmony

with the music; she is a part of the melody," he said, as he scraped away at the languishing Duc de Reichstadt valse, the tune to which our grandmothers used to revolve in the days when the newly imported waltz was denounced as an iniquity.

The grand Hunt Ball, which took place only once in two years at Stratford Town Hall, was to be held in the coming January, and Sir Vernon had consented that Daphne should appear at this festivity, chaperoned by her aunt and accompanied by her elder sister. It was an assembly so thoroughly local that Mrs. Ferrers felt it a solemn duty to be present: even her parochial character, which to the narrow-minded might seem incongruous, made it, she asserted, all the more incumbent upon her to be there.

"A clergyman's wife ought to show her interest in all innocent amusements," she said. "If there were any fear of doubtful people getting admitted, of course I would sooner cut off my feet than cross the threshold; but where the voucher system is so thoroughly carried out——"

"There are sure to be plenty of pretty girls,"

said the Rector, "and I believe there's a capital card-room. I've a good mind to go with you."

"If it were in summer, Duke, I should urge it on you as a duty; but in this severe weather the change from a hot room——"

"Might bring on my bronchitis. I think you're right, Rhoda. And the champagne at these places is generally a doubtful brand, while of all earthly delusions and snares a ball-supper is the most hollow. But I should like to have seen Daphne at her first ball. I am very fond of little Daphne."

"I am always pleased for you to be interested in my relations," replied Mrs. Ferrers, with a sour look; "but I must say, of all the young people I ever had anything to do with, Daphne is the most unsatisfactory."

"In what way?" asked Mr. Ferrers, looking lazily up from his tea-cup.

It was afternoon tea-time, and the husband and wife were sitting *tête-à-tête* before the fire in the Rector's snug study, where the old black oak shelves were full of the most delightful books,

which he was proud to possess but rarely looked at—inside. The outsides, beautiful in tawny and crimson leather, tooled and gilded and labelled and lettered, regaled his eye in many a lazy reverie, when he reposed in his armchair, and watched the firelight winking and blinking at those treasuries of wit and wisdom.

"In what way is Daphne troublesome, my dear?" repeated the Rector. "I am interested in the puss. I taught her her Catechism."

"I wish you had taught her the spirit as well as the letter," retorted Mrs. Ferrers tartly. "The girl is an absolute pagan. After flirting with Edgar Turchill in a manner that would have endangered her reputation had she belonged to people of inferior position, she has the supreme folly to refuse him."

"What you call folly may be her idea of wisdom," answered the Rector. "She may do better than Turchill—a young man of excellent family, but with very humdrum surroundings, and a frightful dead-weight in that mother, who I believe has a life-interest in the estate which would prevent

his striking out in any way till she is under the turf. Such a girl as Daphne should do better than Edgar Turchill. She is wise to wait for her chances."

"How worldly you are, Marmaduke! It shocks me to hear such sentiments from a minister of the gospel."

"My dear, he who was in every attribute a model for ministers of the gospel boasted that he was all things to all men. When I discuss worldly matters I talk as a man of the world. I think Daphne ought to make a brilliant marriage. She has the finest eyes I have seen for a long time—always excepting those which illuminate my own fireside," he added, smiling benignly on his wife.

"Oh, pray make no exception," she answered snappishly. "I never pretended to be a beauty; though my features are certainly more regular than Daphne's. I am a genuine Lawford, and the Lawfords have had straight noses from time immemorial. Daphne takes after her unhappy mother."

"Ah, poor thing!" sighed the Rector. "She

was a lovely young creature when Lawford brought her home."

"Daphne resembles her to a most unfortunate degree," said Aunt Rhoda.

"A sad story," sighed the Rector; "a sad story."

"I think it would better become us to forget it," said his wife.

"My love, it was you who spoke of poor Lady Lawford."

"Marmaduke, I am disgusted at the tone you take about her. Poor Lady Lawford, indeed! I consider her quite the most execrable woman I ever heard of."

"She was beautiful; men told her so, and she believed them. She was tempted; and she was weak. Execrable is a hard word, Rhoda. She never injured you."

"She blighted my brother's life. Do you suppose I can easily forgive that? You men are always ready to make excuses for a pretty woman. I heard of Colonel Kirkbank, the other day. Lady Hetheridge met him at Baden—a wreck. They

say he is immensely rich. He has never married, it seems."

"That at least is a grace in him. 'His honour rooted in dishonour stood; and faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.'"

"You are in a sentimental mood this evening, Marmaduke," sneered Rhoda. "One would suppose that you had been in love with my brother's second wife."

"She has been so long in her grave that I don't think you and I need quarrel if I confess that I admired her. There is a look in Daphne's face now she has grown up that recalls her mother almost painfully. I hope Todd won't burn that pheasant, Rhoda. I'm afraid she is getting a little careless. The last was as dry as a stick."

Scotland made up for a chilly and inferior summer by an altogether superior autumn. The days were ever so much fairer and longer on that wild north coast than they were in Warwickshire; and tempted by the beauty of sky and sea, backed by the urgent desire of his bachelor friend, the skipper of

the smart schooner-rigged yacht *Kelpie,* Gerald Goring stayed much longer than he had intended to stay; atoning, so far as he could atone, for his prolonged absence, by writing his betrothed the most delightful letters, and sending a weekly packet of sepia sketches, which reflected every phase of sea and sky, rock and hill. To describe these things with his brush was as easy to Gerald as it is to other men to describe with their pens.

"It is an idle dreamy life," he wrote. "When I am not shooting land-fowl on the hills, or water-fowl from my dingey, I sit on the deck and sketch, till I grow almost into a sea-vegetable—a zoophyte which contracts and expands with a faintly pleasurable sensation, and calls that life. I read no end of poetry—Byron, Shelley, Keats—and that book whose wisdom and whose beauty no amount of reading can ever dry up—Goethe's 'Faust.' I want no new books—the old ones are inexhaustible. Curiosity may tempt me to look at a new writer; but in an age of literary mediocrity I go back for choice to the Titans of the past. Do you think I am scornful of your favourites, Tennyson and

Browning? No, love. They, too, are Titans; but we shall value them more when they have received the divine honours that can only come after death.

"I am longing to be with you, and yet I feel that I am doing myself a world of good in this rough open-air life. I was getting a little moped at the Abbey. The place is so big, and so dreary, like the palace of the Sleeping Beauty —waiting to wake into life and brightness at the coming of love and you. The lonely rooms are haunted by my dear mother's image, and by the sense of my loss. When you come I shall be so happy in the present that the pain of past sorrow will be softened.

"I sit sketching these romantic caves—where we earn our dinner by shooting the innocent rock-pigeons—and thinking of you, and of my delight in showing you this coast next autumn.

"Yes, love, we will have a yacht. I know you are fond of the sea. Your sister is a fanatic in her love of the water. How she will delight in these islands!"

He thought of Daphne sometimes, as he sat

in the bow of the boat, lulled almost to slumber by the rise and fall of the waves gently lapping the hull. His brush fell idle across the little tin colour-box, and he gave himself up to listless reverie. How Daphne would love this free unfettered life: a life in which there were no formalities; no sitting prim and straight at an orderly dinner-table; no conventional sequence of everyday ceremonies in a hideous monotony. It was a roving gipsy life which must needs please that erratic soul.

"Poor little Daphne! It is strange that she and I don't get on better," he said to himself. "We were such capital friends at Fontainebleau. Perhaps the recollection of that day is in some way disagreeable to her. She has been very standoffish to me ever since—except by fits and starts. There are times when she forgets to be formal; and then she is charming."

Yes; there had been times—times when all that was picturesque and poetical in her nature asserted itself, and when her future brother-in-law succumbed to the spell, and admired her just a

little more warmly than he felt to be altogether well for his peace, or perchance for hers.

Perhaps he, too, had been somewhat formal—had fenced himself round with forms and ceremonies—lest some lurking sentiment which he had never dared to analyse, or even to think about, should grow stronger. He wanted to be honest; he wanted to be true and loyal. But the lovely young face, so piquant, so entrancing in its exquisite girlishness, came across his fancies too often for perfect repose of conscience. The memory of those two summer days at Fontainebleau—idle, foolish, unconsidered hours—was an ever-present part of his mind. It was so small a thing; yet it haunted him. How much better it would have been, he thought, if Daphne had been more candid, had allowed him to speak freely of that innocent adventure! Concealment gave it a flavour of guilt. A hundred times he had been on the point of letting out the secret by this or that allusion, when Daphne's blush and the quiver of Daphne's lip had startled him into caution. This made a secret understanding between them in spite

of his own desire to be honest; and it worried him to think that there should be any such hidden bond.

Madoline was the love of his life, the hope and glory of his days. He had no doubt as to his feelings about her. From his boyhood he had admired, revered, and loved her. He was only three years her senior, and in their early youth the delicately-nurtured, carefully-educated girl, reared among grown-up people, and far in advance of her years, had seemed in all intellectual things the boy's superior. Lady Geraldine was idle and self-indulgent; she petted and spoiled her son, but she taught him nothing. Had he not a private tutor—a young clergyman who preferred the luxurious leisure of the Abbey to the hard work of a curacy—and was not his education sufficiently provided for when this well-recommended young Oxonian had been engaged at a munificent salary? The young Oxonian was as fond of shooting, billiards, cricket, and boating as his pupil; so the greater part of Gerald's early youth was devoted to these accomplishments; and it was only the boy's natural aptitude for learning whatever he wished to learn

which saved him from being a dunce. At fifteen he was transferred to Eton, where he found better cricketing and a better river than in Warwickshire.

From Lady Geraldine the boy had received no bent towards high thoughts or a noble ambition. She loved him passionately, but with a love that was both weak and selfish. She would have had him educated at home, a boudoir sybarite, to lie on the Persian rug at her feet and read frivolous books in fine bindings; to sit by her side when she drove; to be pampered and idolised and ruined in body and soul. The father's strong sense interfered to prevent this. Mr. Giles-Goring was no classic, and he was a self-taught mathematician, while the boy's tutor had taken honours in both branches of learning; but he was clever enough to see that this luxurious home-education was a mockery, that the lad was being flattered by an obsequious tutor, and spoiled by a foolish mother. He sent the Oxonian about his business, and took the boy to Eton, not before Lady Geraldine had done him as much harm as a doting mother can do to a beloved son. She had taught him, unin-

tentionally and unconsciously, perhaps, to despise his father. She had taught him to consider himself, by right of his likeness to her and his keen sympathy with all her thoughts and fancies and prejudices—a sympathy to which she had, as unconsciously, trained and schooled him—belonging to her class and not to his father's. The low-born father was an accident in his life—a good endurable man, and to be respected (after a fashion) for his lowly worth, but spiritually, eclectically, æsthetically, of no kin with the son who bore his name, and who was to inherit, and perhaps waste, his hard-won wealth.

The mother and son had a code of signals, little looks and subtle smiles, with which they communicated their ideas before the blunt plain-spoken father. Lady Geraldine never spoke against her husband: nor did she descend even in moments of confidence to vulgar ridicule. "So like your father," she would say, with her languid smile, of any honest unconventional act or speech of Mr. Giles-Goring's; and it must be confessed that Mr. Giles-Goring was one of those impulsive

outspoken men who do somewhat exercise a wife's patience. Lady Geraldine never lost her temper with him; she was never rude; she never overtly thwarted his wishes, or opposed his plans; but she shrugged her graceful shoulders, and lifted her delicately-pencilled eyebrows, and allowed her son to understand what an impassable gulf yawned between her, the daughter of a hundred earls —or at least half-a-dozen—and the self-made millionaire.

Escaping from the stifling moral atmosphere of his mother's boudoir, Gerald found his first ideas of a higher and a nobler life at South Hill. At the Abbey he had been taught to believe that there were two good things in the world, rank and money; but that even rank, the very flower of life, must droop and fade if not manured with gold. At South Hill he learned to think lightly of both, and to aspire to something better than either. For the sake of being praised and admired by Madoline he worked, almost honestly, at Eton and Oxford. She kindled his ambition, and, inspired by her, his youth and talent blossomed into poetry. He sat

up late at nights writing impassioned verse. He dashed off wild stanzas in the "To Thyrza" style, when his brain was fired by the mild orgies of a modern wine, and the fiercer rapture of a modern bear-fight. And Madoline was his only Thyrza. He was not a man who can find his Egeria in every street. For a little while he fancied that it was in him to be a second Byron; that the divine breath inflated his lungs; that he had but to strike on the cithara for the divine accords to come. He strummed cleverly enough upon the sacred strings, spoiled a good deal of clean paper, and amused himself considerably. Then, failing—in consequence of an utter absence of the critical faculty—to win the prize for English verse, he turned his back upon the Muses, and henceforward spoke with ridicule of his poetic adolescence. Still, the Muse had exercised her elevating influence; and, inspired by her and by Madoline, Gerald Goring had learned to despise those lesser aims which his mother had held before him as the sublimities of life.

He was fond of art, and had a marked talent for painting; but as he never extended his labours

or his studies beyond the amateur's easy course, he was not likely to rise above the amateur's level. Why should a man who is sure to inherit a million submit to the drudgery of severe technical training in order to take the bread out of the mouths of painters who must needs live by their art? Gerald painted a little, now landscape, now figure, as the spirit moved him; sculptured a little; poetised a little; set a little song of his own to music now and then to please Lina; and was altogether accomplished and interesting. But he would have liked to be great, to have had his name bandied about for praise or blame upon the lips of men; and it irked him somewhat to know and feel that he was not of the stuff which makes great men; or, in other words, that he entirely lacked that power of sustained industry which can alone achieve greatness. For his own inward satisfaction, and for Lina's sake, he would have liked to distinguish himself. But the pathway of life had been made fatally smooth for him; it lay through a land of flowery pastures and running brooks, a happy valley of all earthly delights; and how could any man be reso-

lute enough to turn aside from all sensuous pleasures to climb rugged rocky hills in pursuit of some perchance unattainable spiritual delight? There was so much that wealth could give him, that it would have been hardly natural for Gerald Goring to live laborious days for the sake of the one thing which wealth could not give. He had just that dreamy poetic temperament which can clothe sensual joys with the glory and radiance of the intellectual. Politics, statecraft, he frankly detested; science he considered an insult to poetry. He would have liked the stir and excitement, the fever and glory of war; but not the daily dry-as-dust work of a soldier's life, or the hardships of campaigning. He was not an unbeliever, but his religious belief was too vague for a Churchman. Having failed to distinguish himself as a poet, and being too idle to succeed as a painter, he saw no royal road to fame open to him; and so was content to fall back from the race, and enjoy the delicious repose of an utterly aimless life. He pictured to himself a future in which there should be no crumpled rose-leaf; a wife in all things perfect, fondly loved, admired,

respected; children as lovely as a poet's dream of childhood; an existence passed amidst the fairest scenes of earth, with such endless variety of background as unlimited wealth can give. He would not, like Tiberius, build himself a dozen villas upon one rock-bound island; but he would make his temporary nest in every valley and by every lake, striking his tents before ever satiety could dull the keen edge of enjoyment.

Nor should this ideal life, though aimless, be empty of good works. Madoline should have *carte blanche* for the gratification of her benevolent schemes, great or small, and he would be ready to help her with counsel and sympathy; provided always that he were not called upon to work, or to put himself *en rapport* with professional philanthropists—a most useful class, no doubt, but obnoxious to him as a lover of ease and pleasure.

He had looked forward with placid self-satisfaction to this life ever since his engagement—and indeed for some time before that solemn betrothal. From his boyhood he had loved Madoline, and had believed himself beloved by her. Betrothal fol-

lowed almost as a matter of course. Lady Geraldine had spoken of the engagement as a settled thing, ever so long before the lovers had bound themselves each to each. She had told Lina that she was to be her daughter, the only girl she could love as her son's wife; and when Gerald was away at Oxford, Lina had spent half her life at Goring with his mother, talking about him, worshipping him, as men are worshipped sometimes by women infinitely above them.

From the time of his engagement—nay, from the time when first his boyish heart recognised a mistress—Gerald's affection for Madoline had known no change or diminution. Never had his soul wavered. Nor did it waver in his regard and reverence for her now, as he sat on the sunlit deck of the *Kelpie* in this fair autumn weather, his brush lying idle by his side, his thoughts perplexed and wandering. Yet there was a jar in the harmony of his life; a dissonant interval somewhere in the music. The thought of Daphne troubled him. He had a suspicion that she was not happy. Gay and sparkling as she was at times, she was prone to

fits of silence and sullenness unaccountable in so young a creature: unless it were that she cherished some secret grief, and that the hidden fox so many of us carry had his tooth in her young breast.

He was no coxcomb, not in the least degree inclined to suppose that women had a natural bent towards falling in love with him: yet in this case he was troubled by the suspicion that Daphne's stand-offishness was not so much a token of indifference or dislike, as the sign of a deeper feeling. She had been so variable in her manner to him. Now all sweet, and anon all sour; now avoiding him, now showing but too plainly her intense delight in his presence—by subtlest signs; by sudden blushes; by lovcliest looks; by faintly quivering lip or trembling hand; by the swift lighting up of her whole face at his coming; by the low veiled tones of her soft sweet voice. Yes; by too many a sign and token—fighting her hardest to hide her secret all the time—she had given him ground for suspecting that she loved him.

He recalled, with unspeakable pain, her pale distressed face that day of their first meeting at

South Hill; the absolute horror in her widely-opened eyes; the deadly coldness of her trembling hand. Why had she called her boat by that ridiculous name: and why had she been so anxious to cancel it? The thought of these things disturbed his peace. She was so lovely, so innocent, so wild, so wilful.

"My bright spirit of the woods," he said to himself, "I should like your fate to be happy. And yet—and yet——"

He dared not shape his thought further, but the question was in his mind: "Would I like her fate to be far apart from mine?"

Why had she rejected Edgar Turchill, a man so honestly, so obviously devoted to her?—able, one might suppose, to sympathise with all her girlish fancies, to gratify every whim.

"She ought to like him; she must be made to like him," he said to himself, his heart suddenly aglow with virtuous, almost heroical resolve.

His heart had thrilled that night in the shadow of the walnut boughs when he heard Daphne's contemptuous rejection of her lover. He had

been guiltily glad. And yet he was ready to do his duty: he was eager to play the mediator, and win the girl for that true-hearted lover. He meant to be loyal.

"Poor Daphne!" he sighed. "Her cradle was shadowed by a guilty mother's folly. She had been cheated out of her father's love. She need have something good in this life to make amends for all she has lost. Edgar would make an admirable husband."

The *Kelpie* turned her nose towards home next day; and soon Gerald was dreamily watching the play of sunbeam and shadow on the heathery slopes above the Kyles of Bute, very near Greenock, and the station and the express train that was to carry him home. He turned his back almost reluctantly on the sea life, the unfettered bachelor habits. Though he longed to see Madoline again, almost as fondly as he had longed for her four months ago when he was leaving Bergen, yet there was a curious indefinable pain mingled with the lover's yearning. An image thrust itself between him and his own true love;

a haunting shape was mingled with all his dreams of the future.

"Pray God she may marry soon, and have children, and get matronly and dull and stupid!" he said to himself savagely; "and then I shall forget the dryad of Fontainebleau."

He travelled all night, and got to Stratford early in the afternoon. He had given no notice of his coming, either at the Abbey or South Hill, and his first visit was naturally to the house that held his betrothed. His limbs were cramped and stiffened by the long journey, and he despatched his valet and his portmanteau to Goring in a fly, and walked across the fields to South Hill. It was a long walk and he took his time about it; stopping now and then to look somewhat wistfully at the brown river, on whose breast the scattered leaves were drifting. The sky was dull and gray, with only faint patches of wintry sunlight in the west; the atmosphere was heavy; and the year seemed ever so much older here than in Scotland.

He passed Baddesley and Arden, with only a glance across the smooth lawn at the Rectory

where the china-asters were in their glory, and the majolica vases under the rustic verandah made bright spots of colour in the autumn gloom. Then, instead of taking the meadow path to South Hill, he chose the longer way, and followed the windings of the Avon, intending to let himself into the South Hill grounds by the little gate near Daphne's boat-house.

He was within about a quarter of a mile of the boat-house when he saw a spot of scarlet gleaming amidst the shadows of the rustic roof. The boat-house was a thatched erection of the Noah's Ark pattern, and the front was open to the water. Below this thatched gable-end, and on a level with the river, showed the vivid spot of red. Gerald quickened his pace unconsciously, with a curious eagerness to solve the mystery of that bit of colour.

Yes; it was as he had fancied. It was Daphne, seated alone and dejected on the keel of her upturned boat. The yellow collie darted out and leapt up at him, growling and snapping, as he drew near her. Daphne looked at him—or he so fancied—

with a piteous half-beseeching gaze. She was very pale, and he thought she looked wretchedly ill.

"Have you been ill?" he asked eagerly, as they shook hands. "Quiet, you mongrel!" to the suspicious Goldie.

"Never was better in my life," she answered briskly.

"Then your looks belie you. I was afraid you had been seriously ill."

"Don't you think if I had Lina would have mentioned it to you in a postscript, or a *nota bene*, or something?"

"Of course."

"I detest cold weather, and I am chilled to the bone, in spite of this thick shawl," she answered lightly, glancing at the scarlet wrap which had caught Gerald's eye from afar.

"I wonder you choose such a spot as this for your afternoon meditations. It is certainly about the dampest and chilliest place you could find."

"I did not come here to meditate but to read," answered Daphne. "I have got Browning's new poem, and it requires a great deal of hard thinking

before one can quite appreciate it; and if I tell you that Aunt Rhoda is in the drawing-room, and means to stick there till dinner-time, you will not require any further reason for my being here."

"That's dreadful. Yet I must face the gorgon. I am dying to see Lina."

"Naturally; and she will be enraptured at your return," answered Daphne in her most natural manner. "She has been expecting you every day i' the hour."

"Eh?"

"'For in a minute there are many days'—Shakespeare."

"Thank God! I don't object to the bard of Avon half so strongly now. I have been in a country where everybody quotes an uncouth rhymester whom they call Bobbie Bairns. Shakespeare seems almost civilised in comparison. Will you walk up to the house with me?"

She looked down at her open book. She had not been reading when he came unawares upon her solitude. He had seen that; just as surely as he had seen the faint convulsive movement of her

throat, the start, the pallor, that marked her surprise at his approach. He had acquired a fatal habit of watching and analysing her emotions; and it seemed to him that she had brightened since his coming, that new light and colour had returned to her face; almost as you may see the revival of a flower that has drooped in the drought, and which revivifies under the gentle summer rain.

She looked at her book doubtfully, as if she would like to say no.

"You had better come with me. It is nearly tea-time, and I know you are dying for a cup of tea. I never knew a woman that wasn't."

"Exhausted nature tells me that it is tea-time. Yes; I suppose I had better come."

CHAPTER VIII.

"LOVE WOL NOT BE CONSTREINED BY MAISTRIE."

A MAN who lives within easy reach of two good packs of foxhounds, and in a fair hunting country on the very edge of the shires, can hardly mope, albeit he may feel that, in a general way, his heart is broken. Thus it was with Edgar Turchill, who hunted four days a week, and came to South Hill on the off-days to suffer and enjoy all those hot fits and cold fits, those desperate delights plucked from the jaws of pain, which a man feels when he adores a girl who does not care a straw for him. He had been rejected, even with contumely, as it seemed to him: yet so dearly did he delight in Daphne's society that if he were destined never to win her

for his own, the next best blessing he asked from Fate was to be allowed to dangle about her for ever—to fetch and carry, to be snubbed, and laughed at, and patronised, as it pleased her wilful humour.

The autumn and early winter were mild—a capital season for hunting.

"What selfish creatures you sporting men are!" cried Daphne one morning, looking gloomily out at the gloomy November day; "so long as you can go galloping over the muggy fields after innocent foxes you don't care how dreary the world is for other people. We want a hard frost, for then we might have some skating on the pond. I wish the Avon would freeze, so that we could skate to Tewkesbury."

"I daresay we shall have plenty of hard weather in January," said Edgar apologetically. It was one of his off-days, and he had ridden over to South Hill directly after luncheon. "You ought to hunt, Daphne."

"Of course I ought; but Sir Vernon does not see it in the same light. When I mildly suggested

that I thought you wouldn't mind lending me a horse——"

"Mind!" cried Edgar. "That little mare of mine would carry you to perfection; and she's so clever you'd have nothing to do but to sit upon her."

"Exactly. It would be a foretaste of paradise. But at my hinting such a possibility my father gave me a look that almost annihilated me."

"You may be more independently situated next season," suggested Mr. Goring, looking up from the billiard-table, where he was amusing himself with a few random strokes while Madoline was putting on her hat and jacket for a rustic ramble. "You may have your own stable, perhaps, and a nice sporting husband to look after it for you."

Daphne reddened angrily at the suggestion; while poor Edgar put on his sheepish look, and took refuge at the billiard-table.

"Are you coming out for a walk, Empress?" asked Gerald carelessly.

"I don't know. It's such dreary work prowling about a wintry landscape. I think I shall stay at home and read."

"You'd better come," pleaded Edgar, feeling that he would not be allowed the perilous bliss of a *tête-à-tête* afternoon with her, and that, if such bliss were permissible, the pleasure would be mixed with too deep a pain. Out in the fields and lanes, with Goring and Madoline, he might enjoy her society.

She half consented to go, and then, discovering that Madoline was going to make some calls, changed her mind.

"I'll go to my room and finish my third volume," she said.

"What a misanthrope you are, Daphne—a female Timon! I think I shall call you Timonia henceforward," retorted Gerald.

"When it is a question of making ceremonious afternoon visits, I rather hate my fellow-creatures," replied Daphne, with charming frankness. "The nicest people one knows are not half so nice as the figments of fancy one meets in a book; and if the book-person waxes stupid, we can shut him up —which one can't do to a living friend."

So Daphne wished Mr. Turchill good-day, and

went off to her own den—the pretty chintz-draperied bedroom, with its frivolities and individualities in the way of furniture and ornament, and its privileged solitude.

Edgar, feeling that he might be a nuisance to the other two if he offered to accompany them, prepared to take his leave, yet with a lingering hope that Madoline would ask him to remain.

Her kindness divined his wish, and she asked him to stay to dinner.

"You're very kind," he faltered, having dined at South Hill once in the current week, and sorely afraid that he was degenerating into a sponge, "but I've got a fellow to see at Warwick; I shall have to dine with him. But if you'll let me come back in the evening for a game at billiards?"

"Let you? Why, Edgar, you know my father is always glad to see you."

"He is very good—only—I'm afraid of becoming a nuisance. I can't help hanging about the place."

"We are always pleased to have you here—all of us."

Edgar thanked her warmly. He had fallen into a dejected condition; fancying himself of less account than the rest of men since Daphne had spurned him; a creature to be scorned and trampled under foot. Nor did Daphne's easy kindness give him any comfort. She had resumed her tone of sisterly friendship. She seemed to forget that he had ever proposed to her. She was serenely unconscious that he was breaking his heart for her. Why could he not get himself killed, or desperately hurt in the hunting-field, so that she might be sorry for him? He was almost angry with his horses for being such clever jumpers, and never putting his neck in peril. A purl across a bullfinch, a broken collar-bone, might melt that obdurate heart. And a man may get through life very well with a damaged collar-bone.

"I'm afraid the collar-bone wouldn't be enough," mused Edgar. "It doesn't sound romantic. A broken arm, worn in a sling, might be of some use."

He would have suffered anything, hazarded anything, to improve his chances. He tried to lure Daphne to Hawksyard again; tempting her with the stables, the dogs, the poultry-yard; but it was no use. She had always some excuse for declining his or his mother's invitations. She would not even accompany Lina when she went to call upon Mrs. Turchill. She had an idea that Edgar was in the habit of offering his hand and heart to every young lady visitor.

"He made such an utter idiot of himself the night we dined there," she said to Lina. "I shall never again trust myself upon his patrimonial estate. On neutral ground I haven't the least objection to him."

"Daphne, is it kind to speak of him like that, when you know that he was thoroughly in earnest?"

"He was thoroughly in earnest about you before. True love cannot change like that."

"Yet I am convinced that he is true, Daphne," Lina answered seriously.

Autumn slipped into winter. There was a

light frost every night, and in the misty mornings the low meadows glittered whitely with a thin coating of rime, which vanished with those early mists. There was no weather cold enough to curdle the water in the shallow pond yonder by the plantation, or to stop Lord Willoughby's hounds. Daphne sighed in vain for the delight of skating.

Christmas at South Hill was not a period of exuberant mirth. Ever since his second wife's death Sir Vernon Lawford had held himself as much aloof from county society as he conveniently could, without being considered either inhospitable or eccentric. There was a good deal done for the poor, in a very quiet way, by Madoline, and the servants were allowed to enjoy themselves; but of old-fashioned festivity there was none. Mr. and Mrs. Ferrers were asked to dine on Christmas Day. Aunt Rhoda suggested that they should be asked, and accepted the invitation in advance; in order, as she observed, that the bond of family union might be strengthened by genial intercourse upon that sacred anniversary. Gerald

was of course to be at South Hill, where at all times he spent more of his waking hours than at Goring Abbey. Edgar had spoken so dolefully of the dulness of a Christmas Day at Hawksyard that Madoline had been moved by pity to suggest that Mrs. Turchill and her son might be invited to the family feast.

"That will make it a party," said Sir Vernon, when his daughter pleaded for this grace, "and I am not well enough to stand a party."

He was not well. Of that fact there could be no doubt. He had been given to hypochondriacal fancies for the last five years, but there was a certain amount of fact underlying these fancies. The effeminately white hand was growing more transparent; the capricious appetite was more difficult to tempt; the slow promenade on the garden terrace was growing slower; the thin face was more drawn; the aquiline nose was sharper in outline. There was a chronic complaint of some obscure kind, vaguely described by a London specialist, and dimly understood by the family doctor, which must eventually shorten the baronet's

life; but his mind was so vigorous and unbending, his countenance so stern, his manner so uncompromising, that it was difficult to believe that Death had set his mark upon him. To his elder daughter alone he revealed the one tender feeling left in him—and that was his very real affection for herself: a love that was chastened and poetised by his reverent and regretful memory of her mother.

"Dear father, it need not be a party because of the Turchills. Edgar is like one of ourselves, and Mrs. Turchill is so very quiet."

"Ask them, Lina, ask them, if it will be any pleasure to you."

"I think it will please Edgar. He says Hawksyard is so dreary at Christmas."

"If people had not set up a fictitious idea of Christmas gaiety, they would not complain of the season being dull," said Sir Vernon somewhat impatiently. "That notion of unlimited junketing doesn't come from any real religious feeling. Peace on earth and goodwill towards men doesn't mean snapdragon and childish foolery. It is a silly

myth of the Middle Ages, which sticks like a burr to the modern mind."

"It is a pleasant idea that kindred and old friends should meet at that sacred time," argued Lina gently.

"Yes, if kindred in a general way could meet without quarrelling. That there should be a good deal done for the poor at Christmas I can understand and approve. It is the central point of winter; and then there is the Divine association which beautifies every gift. And that children should look forward to Christmas as an extra birthday in every nursery is a pretty fancy enough. But that men and women of the world should foregather and pretend to be fonder of one another on that day than at any other season is too hollow a sham for my patience."

Madoline wrote a friendly invitation to Mrs. Turchill, and gave her note to Edgar to carry home that evening.

"It's awfully good of you," he said ruefully, when she told him the purport of her letter, "but I'm afraid it won't answer. Mother stands on

her dignity about Christmas Day; and I don't think wild horses would drag her away from her own dining-room. I shall have to dine *tête-à-tête* with her, poor old dear; and we shall sit staring at the oak panelling, and pretending to enjoy the plum-pudding made according to the old lady's own particular recipe handed down by her grandmother. There has been an agreeable sameness about our Christmas dinner for the last ten years. It is as solemn as a Druidical sacrifice. I could almost fancy that mother had been out in the woods at daybreak cutting mistletoe with a golden sickle."

Edgar was correct in his idea of his mother's reply. Mrs. Turchill wrote with much ceremony and politeness that, delighted as she and her son would have been to accept so gratifying an invitation, she must on principle reluctantly decline it. She never had dined away from her own house on Christmas Day, and she never would. She considered it a day upon which families should gather round their own firesides, etc., etc., etc., and remained, with affectionate regards, etc.

"How can a family of two gather round a fireside?" asked Edgar dolefully. "The dear old mother writes rank nonsense."

"Don't be down-hearted, Turchill," said Gerald. "Perhaps by Christmas twelvemonth you may be a family of three; and the year after that a family of four; and the year after that five. Who knows? Time brings all good things."

"I am just as grateful to you, Madoline, as if mother had accepted," said Edgar, ignoring his friend's speech, though he blushed at its meaning. "It will be ineffably dreary. If the old lady should go to bed extra early—she sometimes does on Christmas Day—I might ride over, just—just——"

"In time for a rattling good game of billiards," interjected Gerald. "Lina and I are improving. You and Daphne needn't give us more than twenty-five in fifty."

"I'll have a horse ready saddled. Mother likes me to read some of the verses in the 'Christian Year' to her after tea. I'm afraid I'm not a good reader, for Keble and I always send her to sleep."

"Be particularly monotonous on this occasion," said Daphne, "and come over in time for a match."

"You wouldn't be shocked if I came in as late as ten o'clock?"

"I mean to sit up till two," protested Daphne. "It is my first Christmas at home, since I was in the nursery. It must be a Shakespearian Christmas. We'll have a wassail bowl: roasted apples bobbing about in warm negus, or something of that kind. I shall copy out some mediæval recipes for Spicer. Come as late as you like, Edgar. Papa is sure to go to bed early. Christmas will have a soporific effect upon him, as well as upon Mrs. Turchill, no doubt; and the Ferrers people will go when he retires; and we can have no end of fun in the billiard-room, where not a mortal can hear us."

"You seem to be providing for a night of riot —a regular orgy—something almost as dissipated as Nero's banquet on the lake of Agrippa," said Gerald, laughing at her earnestness.

"Why should not one be merry for once in one's life?"

"Why indeed?" cried Gerald, "*Voyue la galère.*

Forget me not, *en vogant la galère.*

There's a line from an early English poet for you, my Shakespearian student."

Christmas Day was not joyless. Daphne, so fitful in her mirth, so sudden in her intervals of gloom—periods of depression which Sir Vernon, Aunt Rhoda, and Madoline's confidential maid and umquhile nurse Mowser, stigmatised as sulks—was on this occasion all sunshine.

"I have made up my mind to be happy," she said at breakfast; which meal she and Madoline were enjoying alone in the bright cheery room, the table gay with winter flowers and old silver, a wood fire burning merrily in the bright brass grate. "Even my father's coldness shall not freeze me. Last Christmas Day I was eating my heart at Asnières, and envying that vulgar Dibb, whose people had had her sent home, and hoping savagely that she would be ever so sick in crossing the Channel. There I was in that dreary tawdry schoolroom, with half-a-dozen mahogany-coloured girls

from Toulon, and Toulouse, and Carcassonne; and now I am at home and with you, and I mean to be happy. Discontent shall not come near me to-day. And you will taste my wassail bowl, won't you, Lina?"

"Yes, dear, if it isn't quite too nasty."

Lina had given her younger sister license for any kind of mediæval experiments, in conjunction with Mrs. Spicer; and there had been much consultation of authorities—Knight, and Timbs, and Washington Irving—and a good deal of messing in the spacious still-room, with a profligate consumption of lemons and sherry, and spices and russet apples. With the dinner at which her father and the Rectory people were to assist, Daphne ventured no interference; but she had planned a Shakespearian refection in the billiard-room at midnight—if they could only get rid of Aunt Rhoda, whose sense of propriety was so strong that she might perhaps insist upon staying till the two young men had taken their departure.

"I wish we could have old Spicer in to matronise the party," said Daphne. "She looks

lovely in her Sunday evening gown. She would sit smiling benevolently at us till she dropped asleep; instead of contemplating us as if she thought the next stage of our existence would be a lunatic asylum, as Aunt Rhoda generally does when we are cheerful."

"I'm afraid you must put up with Aunt Rhoda to-night, Daphne," answered Madoline. "She has suggested that she and the Rector should have the Blue Room, as the drive home might bring on his bronchitis."

"His bronchitis, indeed!" cried Daphne. "He appropriates the complaint as if nobody else had ever had it. So they are going to stay the night! Of all the cool proceedings I ever heard of that is about the coolest. And Aunt Rhoda is one of those people who are never sleepy. She will sit us out, however late we are. Never mind. The banquet will be all the more classical and complete. Aunt Rhoda will be the skeleton."

Daphne contrived to be happy all day, in spite of Mrs. Ferrers, who was particularly ungracious to her younger niece, while she was lavish of

compliments and pretty speeches to the elder. The faithful slave Edgar was absent on duty—going to church twice with his mother; dining with her; devoted to her altogether, or as much as he could be with a heart that longed to be elsewhere. But Daphne hardly missed him. Gerald Goring was in high spirits, full of life and talk and fun, as if he too had made up his mind that this great day in the Christian calendar should be a day of rejoicing for him. They all went to church together in the morning, and admired the decorations, which owed all their artistic beauty to Madoline's taste, and were in a large measure the work of her own industrious fingers. They joined reverently in the Liturgy, and listened patiently to the Rector's sermon, in which he aired a few of those good old orthodox truisms which have been repeated time out of mind by rural incumbents upon Christmas mornings.

After luncheon they all three went on a round of visits to Madoline's cottagers—those special, old-established families to whose various needs, intel-

lectual and corporeal, she had ministered from her early girlhood, and who esteemed a Christmas visit from Miss Lawford as the highest honour and privilege of the year. It was pleasant to look in at the tidy little keeping-rooms, where the dressers shone with a bright array of crockery, and the hearths were so neatly swept, and the pots and pans and brass candlesticks on the chimney-piece, and the little black-framed scriptural pictures, were all decorated with sprigs of ivy and holly. Pleasant the air of dinner and dessert which pervaded every house. Daphne had a basket of toys for the children; a basket which Gerald insisted upon carrying, looking into it every now and then, and affecting an intense curiosity as to the contents. The sky was dark, save for one low red streak above the ragged edge of the wooded lane, when they went back to afternoon tea: and what a comfortable change it was from the wintry world outside to Madoline's flowery morning-room, heavy with the scent of hyacinths and Parma violets, and bright with blazing logs! The low Japanese tea-table was drawn in front of the

fire, and the basket-chairs stood ready for the tea-drinkers.

"I was afraid Aunt Rhoda would be here to tea," said Daphne, sinking into her favourite seat on the fender-stool, in the shadow of the draped mantel-piece. "Is it not delicious to have this firelight hour all to ourselves? I always feel that just this time—this changeful light—stands apart from the rest of our lives. Our thoughts and fancies are all different somehow. They seem to take the rosy colour out of the fire; they are dim and dreamy and full of change, like the shadows on the wall. *We* are different. Just now I feel as if I had not a care."

"And have you many cares at other times?" asked Gerald scoffingly.

"A few."

"The fear that your ball-dress may not fit; or that some clumsy fox-hunting partner may smash the ivory fan which Lina gave you yesterday."

"Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward," answered Daphne sententiously. "Do you think, because I live in a fine house, and have

food and raiment found for me, that I do not know the meaning of care?"

"Well, I should fancy there is a long way between your comprehension of the word and that of a Whitechapel seamstress: a widow, with five small children to keep, and a lodging to pay, upon the produce of her needle, with famine or the workhouse staring her in the face."

"It is the hour for telling ghost-stories," exclaimed Daphne, kneeling at her sister's side to receive her cup and saucer, and trifling daintily with the miniature Queen Anne tongs as she helped herself to sugar. "Lina, tell us the story of this house. It ought to be haunted."

"I am thankful to say I have never heard of any ghosts," answered Madoline. "Every house that has been lived in fifty years must have some sad memories; but our dead do not come back to us, except in our dreams."

"Mr. Goring, I insist upon a ghost-story," said Daphne. "On this particular day—at this particular hour—in this delicious half-light, a story of some kind must be told."

"I delight in ghost-stories—good grim old German legends," answered Gerald languidly, looking deliciously comfortable in the depths of an immense armchair, so low that it needed the dexterity of a gymnast to enable man or woman to get in or out of it gracefully—a downy-cushioned nest when one was there. "I adore phantoms, and fiends, and the whole shopful; but I never could remember a story in my life."

"You must tell one to-night," cried Daphne eagerly. "It need not be ghostly. A nice murder would do—a grisly murder. My blood begins to turn cold in advance."

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said Gerald; "but although I have made a careful study of all the interesting murders of my age I could never distinctly remember details. I should get hideously mixed if I tried to relate the circumstances of a famous crime. I should confound Rush with Palmer, the Mannings with the Greenacres; put the pistol into the hand that used the knife; give the dagger to the man who pinned his faith on the bowl. Not to be done, Daphne. I am no

raconteur. You or Lina had better amuse me. One of you can tell me a story—something classical —John Gilpin, or the Old Woman with her Pig."

"John Gilpin! a horridly cheerful singsong ballad—and in such a fantastic dreamy light as this! I wonder you have not more sense of the fitness of things. Besides, it is your duty to amuse us. A story of some kind we must have, mustn't we, Lina dearest?"

"It would be very pleasant in this half-light," answered Lina softly, quite happy, sitting silently between those two whom she loved so dearly, pleased especially at Daphne's brightness and good-humour, and apparently friendly feeling for Gerald.

"You hear," exclaimed Daphne. "Your liege lady commands you."

"A story," mused Gerald in his laziest tone, with his head lying back on the cushions, and his eyes looking dreamily up at the ceiling, where the lights and shadows came and went so fantastically. "A story, ghostly or murderous, tragical, comical, amorous, sentimental—well, suppose now I were to

tell you a classical story, as old as the hills, or as the laurel-bushes in your garden, the story of your namesake Daphne."

"Namesake!" echoed the girl, with her golden head resting against the arm of her sister's chair, her eyes gravely contemplative of the fire. "Had I ever a namesake? Could there be another set of godfathers and godmothers in the world stupid enough, or hard-hearted enough, to give an unconscious innocent such a name as mine?"

"The namesake I am thinking of lived before the days of godfathers and godmothers," answered Gerald, still looking up at the ceiling, with a dreamy smile on his face; "she was the daughter of a river-god and a naiad, a wild, free-born, untamable creature, beautiful as a dream, variable as the winds that rippled the stream from which her father took his name. Wooers had sought her, but in vain. She loved the wood and the chase, all free and sylvan delights—the unfettered life of a virgin. She emulated the fame of Diana. She desired to live and die apart from the rude race of men—a woodland goddess among her

maidens. Often her father said: 'Daughter, thou owest me a son.' Often her father said: 'Child, thou owest me grandchildren.' She, with blushing cheeks, hung on her father's neck, and repulsed the torch of Hymen, as if it were a crime to love. 'Let me, like Diana, live unwedded,' she pleaded. 'Grant me the same boon Jove gave his daughter.' 'Sweet one,' said the father, 'thy duty forbids the destiny thy soul desires. Love will find thee out.' The river-god spoke words of fatal truth. Love sought Daphne, and he came in a godlike form. Phœbus Apollo was the lover. Phœbus, the spirit of light, and music, and beauty. He saw her, and all his soul was on fire with love. The dupe of his own oracles, he hoped for victory. He saw Daphne's hair floating carelessly upon the wind; the eyes, like shining stars; the sweet lips, which it was pain to see and not to kiss. But lighter than the wind the cruel nymph fled from him. In vain he called her, in vain he tried to stop her. 'Stay, sweet one,' he cried; 'it is no enemy who pursues thee. So flies the lamb the wolf, the hind the lion, the trembling

dove from the strong-winged eagle. But 'tis love bids me follow. Stay thy steps, suspend thy flight, and I will slacken my pursuit. Foolish one, thou knowest not whom thou fliest. No rude mountaineer, or ungainly shepherd pursues thee, but a god before whose law Delphos, Claros, and Tenedos obey; the son of high Jove himself; the deity who reveals the past, the present, and the future; who first wedded song to the stringed lyre. My arrows are deadly, but a deadlier shaft has pierced my heart.' Thus and much more he pleaded, yet Daphne still fled from him, heedless of the briers that wounded her naked feet, the winds that lifted her flowing hair. The breathless god could no longer find words of entreaty. Maddened by love he followed in feverish haste; he gained on her; his breath touched her floating tresses. The inexorable nymph felt her strength failing; with outstretched arms, with beseeching eyes, she appealed to the river: 'Oh, father, if thy waves have power to save me, come to my aid! Oh, mother earth, open and fold me in thine arms, or by some sudden change destroy

the beauty that subjects me to outrage.' Scarcely was the prayer spoken when a heavy torpor crept over her limbs; the nymph's lovely shoulders covered themselves with a smooth bark; her hair changed to leaves; her arms to branches; her feet, a moment before so agile, became rooted to the ground. Yet Phœbus still loved. He felt beneath the bark of the tree the heart-beat of the nymph he adored; he covered the senseless tree with his despairing kisses; and then, when he knew that the nymph was lost to him for ever, he cried: 'If thou canst not be my wife, thou shalt be at least Apollo's sacred tree. Laurel, thou shalt for ever wreathe my hair, my lyre, my quiver. Thou shalt crown Rome's heroes; thy sacred branches shall shelter and guard the palace of her Cæsars; and as the god, thy lover, shines with the lustre of eternal youth, so, too, shalt thou preserve thy beauty and freshness to the end of time.'"

"Poor Daphne," sighed Lina.

"Poor Apollo, I think," said Gerald; "he was the loser. What do you think of my story, Mistress Daphne?"

"I rather like my namesake," answered Daphne deliberately. "She was thorough. When she pretended to mean a thing she really did mean it. There is a virtue in sincerity."

"And obstinacy is a vice," said Gerald. "I consider the river-god's daughter a pig-headed young person, whose natural coldness of heart predisposed her to transformation into a vegetable. Apollo made too much of her."

CHAPTER IX.

"I DEME THAT HIRE HERTE WAS FUL OF WO."

All the servants at South Hill were old servants. Sir Vernon was a stern and an exacting master, but he only asked fair change for his shilling. He did not expect to reap where he had not sown, nor to gather where he had not strewed. His household was carried on upon a large and liberal scale, and the servants had privileges which they would hardly have enjoyed elsewhere. Therefore, with the disinterested fidelity of their profession, and of the human race generally, they stayed with him, growing old and gray in his service.

Among these faithful followers was one who made a stronger point of her fidelity than any of

the others, and affected a certain superiority to all the rest. This was Mowser, Madoline's own maid, who had been maid to Lady Lawford until her death, and who, on that melancholy event, had taken upon herself the office of nurse to the orphan girl. That she was faithful to Madoline, and strongly attached to Madoline, there could be no doubt; but it was rather hard upon the outstanding balance of humanity that she could consider herself privileged by reason of this attachment to be as disagreeable as she pleased to everyone else.

In those early days of Madoline's infancy Mowser had taken possession of the nurseries as her own domain—belonging to her by some sovereign right of custodianship, as entirely hers as if they had been her freehold. Strong in her convictions on this point, she had resented all intrusion from the outer world; she had looked daggers at innocent visitors who were brought to see the baby; she had carried on war to the knife—a war of impertinences and uncivil looks—with Aunt Rhoda, firmly possessed by the idea that

an aunt was an outsider as compared with a nurse.

"Didn't I sit up night after night with her when she had the scarlet-fever, and go without my sleep and rest for a fortnight?" said the faithful one, expatiating vindictively upon her wrongs, in the conversational freedom of the servants'-hall. "Will any of your fine ladies of fashion do that?"

Mrs. Spicer was of opinion that some might, but not Miss Rhoda Lawford. She was a great deal too fond of her own comfort.

Mowser was not a woman of high culture. She had begun the battle of life early, and was too old to have been subject to the exactions of the School Board. She had been born and bred in a Warwickshire village, and educated five-and-thirty years ago at a Warwickshire dame school. Gerald told Daphne that he had no doubt Mowser had every whit as much book-learning as Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden. She was not averse from the use of fine words, but pronounced them after her own fancy. All unauthorised visitors to the nursery she denounced as antelopes, meaning, it was sup-

posed, not the graceful animal of the stag species usually known by that name, but the more obnoxious human individual commonly called an interloper. Even Daphne, when she took the liberty to be born, and was brought by her own particular nurse to Mowser's nursery, was looked on as belonging in some wise to the antelope family; while the strange nurse was, of course, a thoroughbred specimen of that race. While Daphne was an infant, and the second nurse remained, there were fearful wars and rumours of wars in Mowser's apartments, and exultantly did that injured female lift up her voice when Daphne went to her first school—at an age when few children of the landed gentry are sent to school—and the unsanctified nurse departed. She came a Pariah, and she went a Pariah—a creature under a ban.

"Now I can breathe free," exclaimed Mowser, after she had ostentatiously opened the windows and aired the nurseries, as in a Jewish household windows and doors are flung wide when the spirit has departed. "I felt almost stuffocated while she was here."

Sir Vernon, seeing very little of Mowser, and knowing that she was a devoted nurse to his beloved elder daughter, had troubled himself very little about such complaints of her "tempers" as from time to time reached his ears. He discouraged all fault-finding in his sister upon principle. So long as everything in the house, which concerned himself and his own comfort, went on velvet, he was unaffected by the fact that the servants made themselves disagreeable to other people. It was no matter to him that Spicer had been abominably impertinent to Aunt Rhoda in the morning, provided his dinner were well cooked in the evening. Nor did Rhoda's raven croakings about the profligate wastefulness of his household distress him. He knew what he was spending, and that his expenses were so nearly on a level with his income that he always seemed poor: but though he liked to growl and grumble after every inspection of his banker's book, he hated to be worried about pounds of butter, and quarts of milk, and dozens of eggs, by his sister.

"If you pretend to keep my house, Rhoda,

you must keep it quietly, and not plague me about these disgusting details," he said savagely; whereat Rhoda shrugged her elegant shoulders, and protested that if her brother liked to be cheated it was of course no business of hers to step between him and the depredators.

"I don't like to be cheated, but I like still less to be worried," said Sir Vernon decisively; and Rhoda was wise enough to carry on the struggle no longer.

She had her own comfort and her own advantage to consider, and she troubled her brother no further about domestic difficulties: but she carried on her war with the enemy vigorously notwithstanding—fiercest of all with Mowser, who looked upon Miss Lawford as the very head and front of the antelope tribe.

Mowser was a servant of the old school. She prided herself upon the manners and habits of a past generation. She wore corkscrew ringlets, and a cap trimmed with real Buckinghamshire lace —none of your Nottingham machine-made stuff for Mowser. Her petticoats were short and scanty

and her side-laced cashmere boots were a relic of the past. She wore an ostentatious gold chain round her neck, and a portly silver watch at her side. She was rarely seen without a black silk apron, which rustled exceedingly. She was of a bony figure, her face sharp and angular, her eyes a cold hard-looking gray.

When Madoline left the nursery Mowser resumed her original function of lady's-maid. She had no particular gifts for the office. She had no taste for millinery; she had no skill in hairdressing. She had been chosen by Madoline's mother—a young lady of very simple habits—on account of her respectability and local status. She was the daughter of old Mrs. Somebody, who had been thirty years a servant in the first Lady Lawford's family. The houses of the menial and the mistress had been allied for a century or so; and for this reason, rather than for any other, Jane Mowser had been considered eligible for the office of maid.

She was active and industrious, kept her mistress's wardrobe and her mistress's dressing-room

in exquisite order. She could wash and mend laces to perfection. She could pack, and unpack, and was a devoted attendant in illness. But here her powers found their limit. The milliner and the dressmaker had to do all the rest. Mowser had no more taste than any villager in her native hamlet; no capacity for advising or assisting her mistress in any of the details of the toilet. She looked upon all modern fashions as iniquities which were perpetually inviting from heaven a re-issue of that fiery rain which buried Sodom and Gomorrah. To Mowser's mind, jersey jackets and eel-skin dresses, idiot fringes and Toby frills, were the fulfilment of the prophet Isaiah's prophecy. These were the "changeable suits of apparel, the mantles, and the tires, and the crisping pins, the mufflers, and round-tires like the moon;" and all these things were the forecast of some awful doom. It might be earthquakes, or floods, or a hideous concatenation of railway accidents, or the exhaustion of our coal mines, or the total failure of butcher's meat by reason of the foot-and-mouth disease. Mowser did not know what form the

scourge would take; but she felt that retribution, prompt and dire, must follow the reign of painted faces, jersey bodies, and tight-fitting skirts. Young women could not be allowed so to display their figures with impunity. Providence had an eye on their sham complexions and borrowed locks.

All picturesqueness of attire Mowser resented as a play-actress style of dress, altogether degrading to a respectable mind. She objected to Daphne's neatly-fitting, tailor-made gowns, her soft creamy muslins, relieved by dashes of vivid colour, and thought they would end badly. Not so did young ladies dress in Mowser's youth. Small-patterned striped or checked silks, with neat lace berthas fitting close to modestly-covered shoulders, were then the mode. There was none of that artistic coquetry which gives to every woman's dress a distinctive character, marking her out from the throng.

Vainly did Mowser sigh for those vanished days, the simplicity, the high thinking and plain living, of her girlhood. Here was Mrs. Ferrers wasting the Rector's substance upon gowns which five-and-twenty years ago would have been considered

extravagant for a duchess; here was Daphne dressing herself up—with Madoline's approval—to look as much as possible like a play-actress or an old picture.

Mowser was no fonder of Daphne now than she had been in the days when the unwelcome addition to the nursery was stigmatised as an "antelope." There was still a good deal of the antelope about Daphne, in Mowser's opinion. "It would have been better for all parties if Miss Daphne had stayed a year or two longer at her finishing school," Mowser remarked sententiously in the housekeeper's room, where she was regarded, or at any rate was known to regard herself, as an oracle. "First and foremost, she hasn't half finished her education."

"Haven't she, Mowser?" asked Jinman, Sir Vernon's own man, with a malicious twinkle in his eye. "How did you find out that? Have you been putting her through her paces?"

"No, Mr. Jinman; but I hope I know whether a young lady's education is finished, without the help of book learning. My mother was left a lone widow before I was three years old, and I hadn't

the opportunities some people have had, and might have made better use of. But I know what a young lady ought to be, and what she oughtn't to be; and I say Miss Daphne leans most to the last. Why, her manners are not half formed. She goes rushing about the house like a whirlwind; always in high spirits, or in the dumps—no mejum."

"She's dev'lish pretty," said Jinman, who, on the strength of having spent a good deal of time with his master at Limmer's Hotel, put on a metropolitan and somewhat rakish air.

"She's not fit to hold a candle to my mistress," retorted Mowser.

"Not such a reg'lar style of beauty, perhaps, but more taking, more 'chick,'" said the valet.

"I don't know what you mean by 'chick.' She's a born flirt. Perhaps that's what you mean. She's her mother all over, worse luck for her! the same ways, the same looks, the same tones of voice. I wish she was out of the house. I never feel safe or comfortable about her. She's like a dagger hanging over my head; and I don't know when she may drop."

"It's a pity she refused young Turchill," said Jinman. "He's the right sort. But as he still hangs on, I suppose she means to have him sooner or later."

"No, she don't. *That's* not her meaning," answered Mowser with significance.

"What does she mean, then?"

"I know what she means. I know her; much better than her poor innocent sister does. Masks and artifexes ain't no use with me. I can read her. Mr. Turchill ain't good enough for her. She wants someone better than him. But she won't succeed in her mackinventions, while Mowser is by to file her—double-faced as she is."

There was a subtlety about Mowser this evening which her fellow-servants were hardly able to follow. They all liked Daphne, for her pretty looks and bright girlish ways, yet, with that love of slander and mystery which is common to humanity in all circles, they rather inclined to hear Mowser hint darkly at the girl's unworthiness. They all preferred the slandered to the slanderer; but they listened all the same.

And now Christmas was over, and the night of the Hunt Ball at Stratford was approaching. It was to be Daphne's first public appearance; first dance; first grown-up party of any kind. She was to see the county people assembled in a multitude for the first time in her life. A few of them she had seen by instalments at South Hill—callers and diners. She had been invited by these to various lawn parties: but her sister had refused all invitations of this kind, wishing that the occasion of Daphne's *début* should be something more brilliant than a mere garden party, a fool's paradise of curates and young ladies.

Daphne looked forward to the night with excitement, but excitement of that fitful kind which was common to her—now on the tip-toe of expectation, anon not caring a straw for the entertainment. There had been the usual talk about gowns; and Aunt Rhoda had insisted upon coming over to South Hill to give her opinion.

"White, of course, for the *débutante*," said Madoline. "There can be no question about that."

Mrs. Ferrers screwed up her lips in a severe manner, and looked at Daphne with a coldly critical stare.

"White is so very trying," she said, as if Daphne's were not a beauty that could afford to be tried; "and then it has such a bridal air. I daresay there will be half-a-dozen brides at the ball. I know of two — Mrs. Toddlington, and Mrs. Frank Lothrop."

"I don't think Daphne need fear comparison with either of those," answered Madoline, looking fondly at her sister, who was sitting on a cushion at her feet, turning over a book of fashion plates. "Well, darling, do you see anything there you would like?"

"Nothing. Every one of the dresses is utterly hideous; stiff, elaborate; fantastical, without being artistic; gaged and puffed and pleated, and festooned and fringed and gimped. Please dress me for the ball as you have always dressed me, out of your own head, Lina, without any help from Miss Piper's fashion plates."

"Shall I, dear? Would you really prefer

that to choosing something in the very last fashion?"

"Infinitely."

"Then I'll tell you what it shall be. I will dress you like a portrait by Sir Joshua. The richest white satin that money can buy, made as simply as Miss Piper can possibly be persuaded to make it. A little thin lace, cloudlike, about your neck and arms, and my small pearl necklace for your only ornament."

"Madoline, do you think it is wise of you to let Daphne appear in borrowed plumes?" asked Mrs. Ferrers severely. "It may be giving her wrong ideas."

"They shall not be borrowed plumes. The necklace shall be my New Year's gift to you, Daphne, darling."

"No, no, Lina. I am not going to despoil you of your jewels. I have always thought it was dreadfully bad of the Jewesses to swindle the Egyptians before they crossed the Red Sea, even though they were told to do it."

"Daphne!" screamed Aunt Rhoda; "your profanity is something too shocking."

"My pet, I am not going to be contradicted," said Lina, not remarking upon this reproof. "The little necklace is yours henceforward. I have more jewellery than I can ever wear."

"It was your mother's, Madoline, and you ought to respect it."

"It was my mother's nature to give, and not to hoard, Aunt Rhoda. She would have been ashamed of a selfish daughter. Will that do, Daphne? The white satin and old Mechlin lace, and just one spray of stephanotis in your hair?"

"Nothing could be prettier, Lina."

"What are you going to wear yourself, Madoline?" asked Mrs. Ferrers with a dissatisfied air. "I suppose you are going to indulge in a new gown."

"I have hardly made up my mind to be so extravagant. There is the gold-coloured satin I had for the dinner at Warwick Castle."

"Much too heavy for a ball. No, you must have something new, Lina, if it be only to keep me in countenance. I had quite made up my mind to

wear that pearl-gray sicilienne which you all so much admired; but the Rector insisted upon my getting a new gown from Paris."

"From Worth?"

"Can you suppose I could be so extravagant? No, Lina; when I venture upon a French gown I get it from a little woman on a third floor in the Rue Vivienne. She was Worth's right hand some years ago, and she has quite his style. I tell her what colours I should like, and how much money I am prepared to spend, and she does all the rest without giving me any trouble."

It was decided that Madoline should have a new gown of the palest salmon, or blush-rose colour; something which would look well with a profusion of those exquisite tea-roses which MacCloskie produced grudgingly in the winter-tide, burning as much coal in the process as if he were steaming home from China with the first of the tea-gatherings, and wanted to be beforehand with the rest of the trade. Mrs. Ferrers made a good many objections to Daphne's white satin, and was convinced it would be unbecoming to her; also that it would be

wanting in style; yet it would be conspicuous, if not positively *outré*. But Lina had made up her mind, and was a person of considerable decision on occasions. Whatever the colour or material chosen, Aunt Rhoda would have objected to it, as she had not been called upon to advise in the matter.

"Well, Lina, my dear, I must go home and give the Rector his afternoon tea," she said, rising and putting on her fur-lined mantle. "I might have spared myself the trouble of walking over to discuss the ball dresses. You haven't wanted my advice."

"It was very sweet of you to come all the same, auntie," said Lina, kissing her, "and we might have wanted you badly. Besides, your advice is going to be taken. It is to please you that I am going to have a new gown—which I really don't want."

"Be sure Miss Piper makes your waist longer. The last was too short. She is not a patch upon my little Frenchwoman. But you are so bent upon employing the people about you."

"I like to spend my money near home, auntie."

"Even if you are rewarded by being made a guy. Well, at your age, and with your advantages, you can afford to be careless. I can't."

New Year's Day passed very quietly. There was much less fuss about the new year at South Hill than there had been at Madame Tolmache's twelve months ago; where the young ladies had prepared a stupendous surprise—of which she was perfectly aware a month beforehand—for that lady, in the shape of an embroidered sofa-cushion; and where the pupils presented each other with boxes of sweetmeats, and gushed exceedingly, in sentiments appropriate to the occasion.

Except that Daphne found the pearl necklace in a little old-fashioned red morocco case under her pillow when she awoke on that first dawn of the year, the day might have been the same as other days. She sat up in her little curtainless bed, with the necklace in her hand, looking straight before her, into the wintry landscape, into the new year.

"What is it going to be like for me? What

is it going to bring me?" she asked herself, her eyes slowly filling with tears, her face and attitude, even to the listless hand which loosely held the string of pearls, expressive of a dejection that was akin to despair. "What will this new-born year bring me? Not happiness. No, that could not be—that can never be. I lost the hope of that a year and a half ago—on one foolish, never-to-be-forgotten summer day. If I had died before that day—if I had taken the fever like those other girls, and had it badly, and died of it, would it not have been a better fate than to be always fluttering on the edge of happiness; wickedly, wildly happy sometimes when I am with him——wretched when he is away; guilty always—guilty to her, my best and my dearest; shameful to myself; lost to honour; conscience-stricken, miserable?"

Her tears fell thick and fast now, and for some moments she wept passionately, greeting the new year with tears. Then, growing calmer, she lifted the pearls to her lips, and kissed them tenderly.

"It shall be a talisman," she said to herself. "White gift from a white soul, pure and perfect as the giver. Yes, it shall be a charm. I will sin no more. I will think of him no more of whom to think is sin. I will shut him out of my heart. My love, I will forget you! My love, who held my hand that summer day, and read my fate there—an evil fate—yes, for is it not evil to love you? my love, who stole my heart with sweet low words and magical looks—looks and words that meant nothing to you, but all the world—more than the world—to me. Oh, I must find some way of forgetting you. I must teach myself to be proud. It is so mean, so degrading, to go on loving where I have never been loved. If he knew it, how he would despise me! I would die rather than he should know!"

Hard to face a new-born year in such a temper as this, with a heart heavily burdened by a fatal secret; all the world, to outward seeming, smiles and sunshine. For what care could such a girl as Daphne have, a girl who had no more need for the serious consideration of life than the

lilies have? All without, sunshine and turtle-doves; all within, darkness and scorpions.

When she was dressed, save for the putting on of her warm winter gown, Daphne clasped the necklace round her throat. The pearls were not whiter or more perfectly shaped than the neck they clasped.

"I must wear my talisman always," she thought, as she fastened the snap. "Let me be like the prince in the fairy tale, whose ring used to remind him by a sharp little stab when he was drifting into sin."

She went downstairs in a somewhat more cheerful mood than that of her first awaking. There was comfort in the pearls. She kissed her sister lovingly, kneeling by her side as she thanked her for the New Year's gift. There was an open jewel-case on the breakfast-table, and beside it a basket of summer flowers—a basket that had come straight from the sunny south, from the winterless flower-gardens on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Daphne looked at the jewels first—a low thing in human nature, but inevitable. The case con-

ained a sapphire cross, the stones large and lustrous, perfect in their deep azure, and set in the lightest, most delicate mounting—a cross which a princess might hold choicest amongst all her jewels. The flowers were roses, camellias, violets, and a curious thorny-stemmed orange-blossom.

"Oh, Lina," cried Daphne; "orange-blossom with thorns! Isn't that an evil omen?"

"I hope not, dear, but I like the other kind best. This is almost too spiky to put in a flower-glass. But wasn't it good of Gerald to get these flowers sent over from Nice for a New Year's greeting?"

"Oh, it was he who sent them?"

"Who else? There was a little note at the bottom of the basket; and see, this lovely camellia bud is labelled 'For Daphne.'"

"'There's rue for you,'" quoted Daphne, with her half-bitter smile. "Yes, it was very polite of him to remember my existence."

"There is something else for you, darling—a locket, which Gerald asks me to give you from him. He hopes you will wear it at your first ball."

She opened a small blue velvet case, and Daphne beheld an oval locket of dead dull gold with a diagonal band of sapphires. It had a kind of moonlight effect which was very fascinating.

"No," said Daphne gently, but with unmistakable resolve; "I will accept jewels from no one but you. You can afford to give me all I shall ever want, and it is a pleasure to you to give—I know that, dearest—and to me to receive. I cannot accept Mr. Goring's gift, although I appreciate his kindness in offering it."

"Daphne! He will be dreadfully wounded."

"No, he won't. He will understand that I have a touch of pride. From my sister all the benefits in the world; but from him nothing—except this cold white bud!"

She put it to her lips involuntarily, unconsciously; but the contact of the flower he had touched thrilled her with mysterious passion—as if it were his very soul that touched her soul. She shivered and turned pale.

"My pet, you are looking so ill this morning, so cold and wretched," said Madoline, looking up from

fond contemplation of her lover's gifts just in time to see that white wan look of Daphne's.

"I am well enough, but it is a cold wretched morning," answered Daphne, as she bent over the fire, spreading out her dimpled hands before the blaze. "Don't you think New Year's Day is a horrid anniversary?—beginning everything over again from a fresh starting-point; tempting one to think about the future; obliging one to look back at the past and be sorry for having wasted another year. You will go to church, I suppose, and take your dose of remorse in an orthodox form!"

"Won't you come with me, Daphne? Everyone ought to go to church on New Year's Day, even if it were not a sacred anniversary."

"Yes, I'll come, if you like. I may as well be there as anywhere else."

"My darling, is that the way to speak or to think about it?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid I am desperately irreligious. If I had ever found religion do me any good I might be more seriously-minded, perhaps. But when I pray, my prayers seem to come

back to me unheard. I am always asking for bread, and getting a stone."

"Dearest, there can be but one reason for that. You do not pray rightly. Constant, fervent prayer never failed yet to bring a blessing: perhaps not the very blessing we have asked for, but something purer, higher—the peace of God which passeth all understanding. That for the most part is God's answer to faithful prayer."

"Perhaps that is it. I pray in a half-hearted way. 'My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.' I am anchored too heavily to this wicked world. I stretch out my hands to heaven, but not my heart: that is of the earth earthy."

"Come to church, dear, and this solemn day will bring serious thoughts."

"I would go if it were only for the sake of going a little way towards heaven with you. Yes, Lina dearest, I will go and kneel by your side, and pray to become more like you."

"A poor example," answered Madoline, smiling.

And now Sir Vernon entered, pale and drawn

after his late illness, but erect and dignified. There were no family prayers at South Hill, and there never had been since the first Lady Lawford's death. Sir Vernon went to church on Sunday morning, when he considered himself well enough; but all other religious offices he performed in the seclusion of his own rooms. There was therefore no morning muster for prayers, and the servants at South Hill were free to choose their own road to heaven.

Madoline rose to greet her father with loving New Year wishes. Daphne kept her kneeling attitude by the fire, with her face turned towards the blaze, feeling that good wishes from her would be a superfluity.

"My years must always be happy while I have you, dearest," said Sir Vernon, kissing his elder daughter; and then, with some touch of gentlemanly feeling, bethinking himself of the child he did not love, he laid his hand lightly on Daphne's golden head.

"Good morning, Daphne. A happy New Year to you!" he said gently.

She silently turned from the fire, took her father's hand, and raised it to her lips. It was the first time she had ever done such a thing: a little gush of spontaneous feeling, and the father's heart was touched—touched, albeit, like all Daphne's graces, this little bit of girlish graciousness recalled her mother's fatal charms.

"'Bless me, even me also, O my father!'" she exclaimed, recalling one of the most pathetic passages of Holy Writ.

"God bless and prosper you, my dear."

"Thank you, papa. That is a good beginning for the year," said Daphne, stifling a sob. "I don't think I shall feel like Esau any more."

"My dearest, what comparisons you make," cried Madoline. "In what have you ever been like Esau? Have I ever cheated you?"

"Not willingly, darling," answered Daphne, nestling close beside Madoline as she began to pour out Sir Vernon's tea. "You are my benefactress, my guardian angel. Is it your fault if I belong by nature and pedigree to the tribe of Ishmael?"

CHAPTER X.

"AL SODENLY SHE SWAPT ADOWN TO GROUND."

THE second week of January was half over, and it was the night of the Hunt Ball. What girl of eighteen, were her breast ever so gnawed by secret cark and care, could refrain from giving way to some excitement upon the occasion of her first dance, and that a dance which was to be danced by all Warwickshire's beauty and chivalry —a dance as distinguished, from a local standpoint, as that famous assembly in Belgium's capital, which was scared by the thunder of distant guns, the prelude of instant war.

Daphne gave herself up wholly to the delight of the hour. She had been unusually cheerful

and equable in her temper since New Year's Day. That parental blessing, freely and ungrudgingly given, seemed to have sweetened her whole nature. She went to church with Madoline, and prayed with all her heart and soul, and listened without impatience to a string of seasonable platitudes, culled from the elder divines, and pronounced in a humdrum style of elocution by the Reverend Marmaduke Ferrers. She had been altogether blameless in her bearing and her conduct in this new-fledged year: so much so that Mrs. Ferrers had deigned to concede, with chilly patronage, that Daphne was beginning to become a reasonable being.

She had been fighting her inward battle honestly and bravely. She had avoided as much as possible that society which was so poisonously sweet to her. She had been less exacting to her devoted slave, Edgar. She had given more time to improving studies. She had taken up Mendelssohn's Lieder, and practised them industriously, breathing, ah! too much soul into the pathetic passages, dwelling too fondly on the deep

ground-swell of melody, which carries a passionate heart along on its fierce tide, and, in its fervid feeling and exaltation of spirit, is akin to the actual triumph of a happy love.

Unconscious of the danger, and resolutely bent on curing herself of a futile foolish attachment, she yet fed her passion with the fatal food of poetry and music, finding in every heroine she most admired, from Juliet to Enid, a love as inevitably doomed to misery as her own. But all the while she was earnest in her desire to forget.

"If my namesake, in the pride of her purity, could fly from a god who adored her, surely it cannot be hard for me to harden my heart against a man who does not care a straw for me," she told herself scornfully.

The day of the Hunt Ball brought pleasure enough to thrust aside every other thought. Miss Piper had done as well as if she had been born and bred in Paris. Daphne's white satin gown fitted the slim and supple figure to perfection. It was not the ivory tint of late years, but that

exquisite pearly white, with a blackish tinge in the shadows, which one sees in old pictures. Daphne, with her wavy hair coiled at the back of her beautifully-shaped head, and with just one spray of stephanotis nestling in the coils, looked like a Juliet painted by Sir Joshua. It was Juliet's dress, as Juliet used to be dressed by actresses of an age less given to the research of correctness and elaboration in costume. The single string of pearls on the pearly neck, the bodice modestly draping the lovely shoulders, the round white arms peeping from elbow-sleeves of satin and lace, the long loose gloves, the slender feet in white satin sandalled shoes, meant for dancing —not in those impossible high-heeled instruments of torture which Parisian bootmakers have inflicted on weak woman—all had something of an old-fashioned air; but it was a very lovely old fashion, and Madoline was delighted with the result.

"Rather *outré*, don't you think?" said Mrs. Ferrers, sourly contemplative of Daphne's fresh young beauty, which made her own complexion look so much yellower than usual, when she hap-

pened to glance across the girl's shoulder at her own face in the big cheval glass. "A little too suggestive of Kate Greenaway's Baby Books."

She was trying to settle herself in her panoply of state, a gorgeous arrangement in ruby velvet and cream-coloured satin, which the little Frenchwoman in the Rue Vivienne had only sent off in time to reach Mrs. Ferrers two hours ago, after keeping her in an agony of mind for the last three days. It was a very splendid gown, so slashed, and draped, and festooned, that it was a mystery how it could ever be put together. The velvet cuirass was laced up the back with thick gold cord, and fitted like a strait-waistcoat; and the ruby scarf was fringed with heavy bullion, which drooped above a stormy sea of cream-coloured satin, that went billowing and surging round the lady's legs till it met a long narrow streak of ruby velvet lined with satin, which meandered for about twelve feet along the floor. That Mrs. Ferrers must be a nuisance to herself and everybody else in such a dress no one in their senses could doubt; but then on the other hand the gown was undoubtedly

in the latest fashion, and was one which must evoke a pang of envy in every female breast.

"I don't wonder you look disdainfully at my short petticoats, Aunt Rhoda," said Daphne, smiling at the effect of her sandalled ankles as she pirouetted before the looking-glass; "but I think, when it comes to dancing, I shall be better off than you with your velvet train."

"I am not likely to dance much," answered Mrs. Ferrers with dignity. "Indeed, as a clergyman's wife, I don't know that I shall dance at all."

"Then you will have to sit with your train coiled round your feet to prevent people walking on it, and that will be worse," retorted Daphne.

It was a clear cold night, with a brilliant moon —a glorious night for a country drive—frosty, but not severe enough to make the roads slippery; besides, Boiler and Crock were the kind of horses that nobody hesitates to have roughed on occasion.

Sir Vernon had decided on escorting his daughters to the ball. It was a sacrifice of his

own ease and comfort, but he felt that the occasion required it.

"I shall stay an hour," he said, "and then Rodgers can drive me home, and go back to fetch you later. It won't hurt the horses going over the ground a second time."

"Dear father," said Madoline, "it is so good of you to go with us."

And now, after a reviving cup of tea, and careful wrapping in fur-lined cloaks and Shetland shawls, the three ladies and Sir Vernon conveyed themselves into the roomy landau, and were soon bowling along the smooth high-road towards Stratford. What a transformed and glorified place the little town seemed to-night—all lights, and people, and loud and authoritative constabulary! such an array of fiery-eyed carriages, three abreast in the wide street in front of The Red Horse! such a block in the narrower regions about the Town Hall! so much confusion, despite of such loud endeavours to maintain order!

It seemed to Daphne as if they were going to sit in the carriage all night, with the humbler

townsfolk peering in at them from the pavement, and making critical remarks to each other in painfully distinct voices.

"Ain't the fair one pretty?" "The dark one's the handsomest." "My eye! look at the old lady's diamonds." "That's Lord Willerby." "No, it ain't, stoopid." "I see the coronet on the kerridge." "My, what lovely hair she's got!" "White satin, ain't it?" and so on, while cornets and violins sounded in the distance with distracting melody.

"It'll be dreadful if we have to sit in the street quite all the evening," said Daphne, listening hopelessly to the voice of authority, with its perpetual "Move on, coachman."

They waited about twenty minutes, and then slowly drove up to the doorway, where the eager faces of the crowd made a hedge on each side. Difficult to believe that this entrance hall, luminous with lamps and bright with flowers, was the same which gave admittance to such prosaic beings as town-clerks and vestrymen, justices of the peace and policemen. Edgar and Gerald were both

hovering near the doorway, waiting for the South Hill party: Edgar, at the risk of being accused of deserting his mother, whom he had established in a comfortable corner of the ball-room, and then incontinently left to her own reflections, or to such conversation as she might be able to find among sundry other dowagers arrived at the same wall-flower stage of existence.

"I thought you were never coming," said Edgar, offering Daphne his arm, and in a manner appropriating her.

"I thought we were going to spend the evening in the street," answered Daphne.

Gerald gave his arm to Madoline; Sir Vernon followed with his sister, whose high-heeled Louis Quinze shoes matched her gown to perfection, but were not adapted for locomotion. Happily she was a light and active figure, and managed to trip up the broad oak stairs somehow; though she felt as if her feet had been replaced by the primitive style of wooden leg, the mere dot-and-go-one drumstick, with which the Chelsea pensioner used to be accommodated before the days of

elaborate mechanical arrangements in cork and metal.

The ball-room was already crowded, the South Hill party having arrived late, by special desire of Aunt Rhoda, who strongly objected to be among those early comers who roam about empty halls dejectedly, taking the chill off the atmosphere for the late arrivals. Dancing was in full swing, and the assembly in the big ball-room made a blaze of colour against the delicate French-gray walls ; the pink of the fox-hunters, and the uniforms of the officers from Warwick and Coventry, showing vividly amongst the pale and airy drapery of their partners. There were more than two hundred in the room already, Edgar told Daphne, as he pointed out the more striking features of the scene.

"I daresay there'll be nearer three hundred before midnight," he said. "It's going to be a grand affair. Only once in two years, you see: people save themselves up for it. A lot of fellows in pink, aren't they?"

"Yes. Why didn't you wear a scarlet coat? It's much prettier than black."

"Do you really think so? If I'd known——" faltered Edgar. "But I felt sure you would have laughed at me if I'd sported the swallow-tail I wear at hunt dinners sometimes."

"I daresay I should," Daphne answered coolly; "but you'd have looked ever so much nicer all the same."

Edgar felt regretful. He had debated with himself that question of pink or no pink; and the thought of Daphne's possible ridicule had turned the scale in favour of sober black; and now she told him he would have looked better in the more distinctive garb. And there were fellows who could hardly jump a drain-pipe showing off in their Poole or Smallpage coats, and giving themselves Nimrod airs which imposed upon the sweet simplicity of their partners.

The room was a noble room, long and lofty, divided from a spacious antechamber by a wide square doorway, supported by classic pillars. Over this doorway was the open gallery for the band. The ball-room was lighted by a large central chandelier, and two sun-burners in the ceiling;

while from lyre-shaped medallions on the walls projected modern gas brackets in imitation of old-fashioned girandoles of the wax-candle period.

There were four full-length portraits on the walls: the Duke of Dorset, by Romney; a portrait of Queen Anne, as uninteresting as that harmless ady was in the flesh. The remaining two pictures had to do with the local divinity. One was Gainsborough's portrait of Garrick, leaning against the bust of Shakespeare; the other was the poet seated, in his habit as he lived, by Wilson.

"You see," said Gerald, close behind Daphne, "there is the Warwickshire idol. One can't get away from him. Why can these bucolics worship nothing but the intellectual emanation of their soil? Why not a little homage to muscular christianity, in the person of Guy, Earl of Warwick, a paladin of the first water, a man who rescued damsels, and fought with giants and dun cows, and was strong, and brave, and faithful, pious, self-sacrificing, devoted in every act of his life? There is a hero worthy of worship. Yet you all ignore him, and bow down before this golden calf of a dramatist,

who sued his friend for a twopenny loan, and left the wife of his bosom a second-best bedstead—a paltry fellow beside Guy, the hero-hermit, living on bread and water, and only revealing himself at his death to the wife he adored."

"Guy was a very nice person, if one could quite believe in the giant and the dun cow," said Daphne.

"I believe implicitly in Colbrand the giant," answered Gerald, "but I own I have never been able to swallow the monster cow; and I am all the more inclined to repudiate her because her bones were on view at Warwick in Shakespeare's time."

"And it was very sweet of him to end his days so quietly in the hermit's cave at Guy's Cliff," pursued Daphne, who was well versed in all Warwickshire lore, chiefly by oral instruction from Edgar, "and to take alms from his own wife every morning, as one of the thirteen beggars she was in the habit of relieving; though I have never quite understood why he did it. But in spite of all these grand acts of Guy's we know nothing of the man himself, while Shakespeare is like one's brother.

He has sounded the deep of every mind, and has given us the treasures of his own."

"I suspect he would rather have given anything than his money," retorted Gerald.

They had penetrated to Mrs. Turchill's corner by this time. That matron was looking the picture of disconsolate solitude—the dowager with whom she had been talking about her servants and her tradespeople having left her to look after a brace of somewhat go-ahead daughters, who in pale blue silk jerseys, and tight cream-coloured cashmere skirts, looked very much as if they were attired for some acrobatic performance.

"I am so glad you have come," exclaimed poor Mrs. Turchill, brightening at the sight of Madoline. "The room is dreadfully crowded, and there are so many strangers." This was said resentfully, no stranger having any more right to be present, from Mrs. Turchill's point of view, than Pentheus at his mother's party. "I feel as if I hardly knew a creature here."

"Oh, mother, when there are the Hilldrops, and the Westerns, and the Hilliers, and the Perkinses,"

remonstrated Edgar, running over a string of names.

"All I can say is that if there are any of my friends in the room no one has taken the trouble to bring them to me," retorted Mrs. Turchill. "And for any enjoyment I have had from the society of my friends I might as well be at that horrid Academy conversazione for which you took so much trouble to get tickets the year before last, and where I was jammed into a corner of the sculpture room half the evening, with rude young women sitting upon me."

Here Sir Vernon and Mrs. Ferrers approached, and Mrs. Turchill resumed her company smile in honour of people of such importance. Aunt Rhoda had been exchanging greetings with the cream of the county people during her leisurely progress through the rooms, and felt that her gown was a success, and that the little woman in the Rue Vivienne was worthy of her hire. Everybody was looking at Daphne. Her youth and freshness, her vivid smiles and natural girlish animation, as she conversed now with Edgar, and anon with Gerald,

fascinated everyone; it was a manner entirely without reserve, yet with no taint of forwardness or coquetry—the manner of a happy child, whose sum of life was bounded by the delight of the moment, rather than of a woman conscious of her loveliness, and knowing herself admired.

"Who is that pretty girl in the white satin frock—the girl like an old picture?" people were asking, somewhat to the annoyance of older stagers in the beauty-trade, who felt that here was a new business opened, which threatened competition, stock-in-trade of the best quality, and perfectly fresh.

One young lady, whose charms had suffered the wear and tear of seven seasons, contemplated Daphne languidly through her eye-glass, and summed her up with scornful brevity as "the little Gainsborough girl!"

"Quite too lovely, for the next six months," said another, "but her beauty depends entirely on her complexion. A year hence she will have lost all that brightness, and will be a very wishy-washy little person."

"And then I suppose she'll paint, as the others do, don't you know," drawled her partner; "carmine her lips, and all that sort of thing."

The lady looked at him suspiciously out of the corner of a carefully darkened eyelid.

"Let us hope she won't sink quite so low as that," she said with dignity.

There was no doubt as to Daphne's triumph. Before she had been an hour in the room, she was the acknowledged belle of the ball. People went out of their way to look at her. She walked once round the rooms on her father's arm, and in that slow and languid progress held, as it were, her first court. It was her first public appearance; her father's friends clustered round him, eager to be presented to the *débutante*. Stately dowagers begged that she might be made known to them All the best people in the room knew Sir Vernon, and all professed a friendly desire to know his younger daughter. Her card was full before she knew what she was doing.

"Our little Daphne is a success!" said Gerald to his betrothed, as they glided round the room

in a languorous trois-temps. "All the Apollos are running after her."

"I am so glad. Dear child! it is such a pleasure to see her happy," answered Madoline softly.

"I hope her head won't be turned by all this adulation. It is such a poor little puff-ball of a head. I sometimes fancy she has thistledown inside it instead of brains."

"Indeed, dear, she has plenty of sense and serious feeling," remonstrated Madoline, wounded by this allegation. "But she is painfully sensitive. She needs very tender treatment."

"Poor butterfly!"

"Do you like her dress?"

"It is simply perfect. Your taste, of course."

"Yes; she let me have my own way in the matter."

"And as a reward she is looking her loveliest. It is not the calm beauty of a princess, like my Lina's; but for a spoiled-child kind of prettiness, capricious, mutinous, variable, there could be nothing better."

Later he was at Daphne's side, as she sat in a corner by her aunt, with half-a-dozen young men hovering near, Edgar nearest of all, holding her fan.

"I suppose you have saved at least one dance for me, Empress," he said, taking her programme from her hand.

"I don't know. All sorts of people have been writing down their names."

"All sorts of people," echoed Gerald, examining the card. "You will be a little more respectful about your partners in your seventh or eighth season. Why, here, under various hieroglyphics, are the very topmost strawberries in the social basket—masters of foxhounds, eldest sons of every degree, majors and colonels—and not one little waltz left for me! I claim you for the first extra."

"I—I'm rather afraid I'm engaged for the extras."

"No matter. You were solemnly engaged to me for one particular waltz when first this ball was spoken of at South Hill. You don't remember,

perhaps; but I do. I claim my bond. I will be a very Shylock in the exaction of my due."

"If you were a better Shakespearian it would occur to you that Shylock got nothing," retorted Daphne, smiling up at him.

"He was an old idiot. Remember, the first extra valse. We shall meet at Philippi."

He was off to claim Lina for the Lancers. It was the last dance before supper. Sir Vernon had disappeared ever so long ago. Mrs. Ferrers was standing up with a major of dragoons, in all the splendour of his uniform, and felt that she and her partner made an imposing picture. Edgar and Daphne were sitting out this square dance on the stairs, the girl somewhat exhausted by much waltzing, the man exalted to the seventh heaven of bliss at being permitted to bear her company.

"May I take you down to supper?" he asked.

"Thanks; no. My last partner—the man in the red coat——"

"Clinton Chetwynd, master of the Harrowby Harriers?" interjected Edgar.

"Told me that the best dancing will be when

two-thirds of the people are gormandising downstairs. You can get me an ice, if you like."

Edgar obeyed; but when he came back with the ice Daphne had vanished from the landing, and he got himself entangled in a block of people struggling down to supper.

The rooms below—those solemn halls in which on ordinary occasions the local offender stood at the bar of justice to answer for his misdeeds—were now a scene of glitter and gaiety; flower-wreathed épergnes, barley-sugar pagodas, and all the tinselly splendour of a ball-supper. Bar, and bench, and magisterial chairs had vanished as if by magic. The magistrate's private apartment and the justice-hall had been thrown into one spacious banqueting-chamber, where even the proverbial greediness of the best society—the people who tread upon each other's toes and rush for the grapes and peaches at Buckingham Palace—might be satisfied without undue scrambling. But though there would have been room for him at the banquet, and although there were any number of eligible young ladies waiting to be taken down,

Edgar scorned the idea of a supper which Daphne did not care for. To have sat by her, squeezed into some impossible corner of a rout-seat, to have fought for lobster-salad for her, and guarded her frock from the ravages of awkward people, and pulled cracker bon-bons with her, would have been bliss; but the festal board without her would be every whit as funereal a banquet as the famous sable feast at which that cheerful practical joker Domitian entertained his courtiers.

Mr. Turchill found a good-natured fox-hunter to take his mother down, and having seen that lady's silver-gray satin—newly done up with violet velvet by Miss Piper for the occasion—making its deliberate way down the broad staircase, on the sportsman's sturdy scarlet arm, Edgar went back to the almost empty ball-room, where about fifteen or twenty couples were revolving to the last sugary-sweet German waltz, "*Glaubst du nicht?*"

Daphne and Gerald were among these; Madoline was sitting with some girl-friends in the entrance of one of the windows, and to this point Edgar made his way.

"You've not been down to supper," he remarked, by way of saying something original.

"Do you know, I don't much care about going down. If Gerald particularly wishes it I shall go after this dance; but I think I should enjoy a sandwich and a cup of tea when I get home better than the scramble downstairs."

The waltzers were dropping off by degrees; but Gerald and Daphne still went on revolving with gliding languid steps to the dreamy melody. They moved in exquisite harmony, although this was the first time they had ever waltzed together. Never in the twilight dances at South Hill had Mr. Goring asked Daphne to be his partner. He had been content to stand outside in the porch, smoking his cigarette, and looking on, while she and Edgar waltzed, or to take a few lazy turns afterwards with Madoline to Daphne's music. To-night for the first time his arm encircled her; her sunlit head rested against his shoulder. It seemed to him that his hand had never clasped hers since that summer-day at Fontainebleau, just a year and a half ago; when they had stood by the golden water, with the

hungry-eyed carp watching them, and a sky of molten gold above their heads. They had been far apart since that day; dissevered by an impalpable abyss; and now for the moment they were one, united by that love-sick melody, their pulses stirred by the same current. Was it strange that in such a moment Gerald Goring forgot all the world except this perfect flower of youth and girlhood which he held in his arms—forgot his betrothed wife, and all her grace and beauty; lived for the moment, and in the moment only, as butterflies live—with a past not worth remembering, and annihilation for their only future? As the dancers dropped off the band played slower and slower, meaning to expire in a *rallentando*, and those two waltzers gliding round drifted unawares into the outer and smaller room, where there was no one.

"*Glaubst du nicht?*" sighed the band, "*Glaubst du nicht? Ach Liebchen, glaubst du nicht?*" and with the last sigh of the melody, Gerald bent his lips over Daphne's golden hair and breathed a word into her ear—only one word, wrung from

him in despite of himself. But that one word so breathed from such lips was all the history of a passionate love which had been fought against in vain. The last sigh of the music faded as the word was spoken, and Daphne was standing by her partner's side white as ashes.

"Take me back to my sister, please."

He gave her his arm without a word, and they walked slowly across to the group by the window; but before Madoline could make room for Daphne to sit by her side the girl tottered, and would have fallen, if Edgar had not caught her in his arms.

"She is fainting!" he cried alarmed. "Some water—brandy—something!" He wrenched open the window, still holding Daphne on his left arm. The frosty night-air blew in upon them, keen and cold. Daphne's white lips trembled, and the dark gray eyes opened and looked round with a bewildered expression, as she sank slowly into the seat beside Madoline, whose arms were supporting and embracing her.

"My darling, you have danced too much. You

have over-excited yourself," said Lina tenderly; while three or four smelling-bottles came to the rescue.

"Yes; that last dance was too much," faltered Daphne, cold and trembling in her sister's arms. "But I'm quite well now, Lina. It was nothing. The heat of the room."

"And you are tired. We'll go home directly we can find Aunt Rhoda."

"I'll go and hunt for her," said Gerald, who had been standing vacantly looking on, his brain on fire, his heart beating tumultuously, the vulture conscience gnawing his vitals already.

He had been thinking of Rousseau's Julie, and that first kiss given in the bosquet—the fatal first kiss—the beginning of all evil.

"My sweeter Julie—so much more lovely—so much more innocent," he thought, as he went slowly downstairs in quest of the ruby velvet arrangement which contained Mrs. Ferrers. "God give me grace to respect your purity!"

The winter wind rushed into the heated ball-room with a sharp chill breath that was suggestive of

another and a colder world, like the deadly air from a vault, and soon steadied Daphne's reeling brain.

"You see I am not such a good waltzer as I thought I was," she said, looking up at Edgar with a sickly smile. "I did not think anything could make me giddy."

"You would rather go home now, would you not, dear?" asked Madoline. "You have had enough of the ball."

"More than enough."

"Let me fetch your wraps from the cloak-room," said Edgar. "It will save you a good deal of trouble."

"If you would be so very kind."

"Delighted. Give me your ticket. Seventy-nine. All under one number, I suppose."

He ran off, and this time had to stem the tide setting in towards the ball-room; the young men and maidens who had eaten their supper and were eager for more dancing. Coming back with a pile of cloaks and shawls on his arm, he joined Gerald and Mrs. Ferrers, her red-coated major still in attendance.

"What can Daphne mean by making a spectacle of herself at her first ball?" asked Aunt Rhoda, not a little aggrieved at being ruthlessly dragged away from a knot of the very best people, a little group of privileged ones, which included a countess and two baronets' wives. "But it is just like her."

"There was no affectation in the matter, I can assure you," said Edgar indignantly; "she looked as white as death."

"Then she should have danced less. I detest any exhibition of that kind. I'm very glad my brother was not here to see it."

"I think Sir Vernon has had so much reason to be proud of his daughter this evening that he would readily have forgiven her iniquity in fainting," retorted Edgar, his blood at boiling-point from honest indignation.

Daphne, wrapped in a long white cashmere cloak lined with white fur, looked very pale and ghostlike as she went slowly through the rooms on Edgar's arm, attacked on her way by the reproaches of the partners with whom she was breaking faith by this untimely departure.

"I'm awfully sorry," she said, with a faint touch of her natural gaiety, "but I'll pay my debts this time two years. The engagements can stand over."

When the bi-annual Hunt Ball comes round at Stratford-on-Avon there are some, perhaps, who will remember her promise, and the pale, pathetic face, and white-robed figure.

Five minutes later the three ladies were seated in their carriage, Mrs. Ferrers still grumbling, while Edgar lingered at the door adjusting Daphne's wraps.

Just as he was going to shut the door, having no excuse for further delay, Daphne took his hand and clasped it with friendly warmth.

"How good you are!" she said softly, looking up at him with eyes that to his mind seemed lovelier than all the lights of the firmament, infinitely glorious on this frosty night in the steel-blue sky. "How good you are! how staunch and true!"

It was only well-merited praise, but it moved him so deeply that he had no power to answer, even by the smallest word. He could only grasp

the slender little hand fervently in his own, and then shut the carriage-door with a bang, as if to drown the tumult of his own heart.

"Home, coachman," he called, in a choking voice; an entirely superfluous mandate, neither coachman, nor footman, nor horses, having the least idea of going anywhere else.

CHAPTER XI.

"FOR WELE OR WO, FOR CAROLE, OR FOR DAUNCE."

EDGAR went back to the ball-room with his heart so penetrated with bliss, that the whole scene had an unreal look to him in its brightness and gaiety, as if in the next instant dancers, and lights, and music, and familiar faces might vanish altogether, and leave him suspended in empty space, alone with his own deep delight. He was as near Berkeley's idea of the universe as a man so solid and substantial in his habits could be. Thought and feeling to-night made up his world; all the rest might be nothing but a spectral emanation from his own brain. He lived, he thought, he felt; and his heart and brain were filled with one

idea, and that was Daphne. The ball-room without Daphne, albeit the Caledonians were just being danced with considerable spirit, was all falsehood and hollowness. He saw the spurious complexions, the scanty draperies, all the artificial graces and meretricious charms, as he had not seen them while she was there. That little leaven had leavened the whole lump. His eye, gladdened by her presence, had seen all things fair. But although he was inclined to look contemptuously upon the crowd in which she was not, the gladness of his heart made him good-naturedly disposed to all creation. He would have liked to leave that gay and festive scene immediately; but finding his mother enjoying herself very much in a snug corner with three other matrons, all in after-supper spirits, he consented to wait till Mrs. Turchill had seen one or two more dances.

"I like to watch them, Edgar," she said, "though I feel very thankful to Providence that we didn't dance in the same style, or wear such tight dresses, in my time. I remember reading that they wore scanty skirts and hardly any bodices

in the period of the French Revolution, and that some of their fashionable women even went so far as to appear with bare feet, which is almost too revolting to mention. All I can say is, that I hope the dresses I see to-night are not the signs of an approaching revolution in England; but I should hardly be surprised if they were. Do go and get a nice partner and let me see you waltz, Edgar. You've improved wonderfully since the Infirmary Ball last year."

"I'm glad you think so, mother, but I shan't dance any more to-night. I made no engagements for after supper, except with Daphne, and she has gone home."

"Oh, the South Hill people have gone, have they? Well, if you're not going to dance any more perhaps we may as well be going too," said Mrs. Turchill, perceiving that a good many of the county people were slipping quietly away, and not wishing to be left with the masses.

So Edgar, very glad to escape, gave his mother his arm and assisted her to the cloak-room, where she completely extinguished herself in a valuable

though somewhat old-fashioned set of sables, which covered her from head to foot, and made her look like a walking haystack.

How full of happy fancies the young man's mind was as they drove through the lanes and cross-country roads to Hawksyard, under that brilliant sky, so peopled with worlds of light—"gods, or the abodes of gods;" he cared to-night no more than Sardanapalus what those stars might be—with now a view of distant hills, far away towards the famous Wrekin, a cloudlike spot in the extreme distance, and now vivid gleams of the nearer river, glittering under those glittering stars.

"Isn't it a delicious night, mother?" he cried, and only a gentle snore—a snore expressive of the blissfulness of repose after exertion—breathed from the matronly mass of furred cloak and hood.

He was quite alone—glad to be alone—alone with his new sense of happiness, and the starry night, and the image of his dear love.

She had spoken him fair; she meant to make

him happier than man ever was upon earth, since the earth could have produced but one Daphne. She must have meant something by those delicious words, that sweet spontaneous praise. Unsolicited she had taken his hand and pressed it with affectionate warmth—she who had been so cold to him—she who had never evinced one touch of tender feeling before; only a frank, sisterly kindness, which was more galling than cruelty. And to-night she had lifted up her eyes and looked at him — eyes so mournfully sweet, so exquisitely beautiful.

"My angel, that marble heart is melted at last," he said to himself. "Who would not be constant, for such a reward?"

He had only been in love with Daphne a little over six months, yet it seemed to him now that in that half year lay the drama of his life. All that went before had been only prologue. True that he had fancied himself in love with Madoline—the lovely and gracious lady of his youthful dreams—but this was but the false light that comes before the dawn. He felt some touch of shame at having

been so deceived as to his own feelings. He remembered that afternoon in the meadows between South Hill and Arden Rectory, when he had poured his woes into Daphne's sympathising ear; when she, his idol of to-night, his idol for evermore, had seemed to him only a pretty schoolgirl in a muslin frock. Was she the same Daphne? Was he the same Edgar? She who now was a goddess in his sight. He who wondered that he could ever have cared for any other woman. The disciple of Condillac, when he sits himself down seriously to think out the question whether the rose which he touches and smells is really an independent existence, or only exists in relation to his own senses, was never in a more bewildered condition than honest Edgar Turchill when he remembered how devotedly, despairingly, undyingly, he had once loved—or fancied that he loved—Madoline.

"Romeo was the same," he told himself sheepishly, having taken to reading Shakespeare of late, to curry favour with that fervid little Shakespearian, Daphne; "madly in love with

Rosaline at noon—over head and ears in love with Juliet before midnight. And critics say that Shakespeare knew the human heart."

Sleep that night was impossible for the master of Hawksyard. Happily there was but a brief remnant of the night left in which he need lie tossing on his sleepless couch, staring at the brown oak panels, where the reflection of the night-lamp glimmered like a dim starbeam in a turbid pool. Cold wintry dawn came creeping over the hills, and at the first streak of daylight he was up and in his icy bath, and then on with his riding-clothes and away to the stable, where only one sleepy underling was moving slowly about with a lantern, calling drowsily to the horses to stand up and come out of a warm stable, in order to be tied to a wall and have pails of water thrown at them in a cold yard.

To saddle Black Pearl with his own hands was but five minutes' work, and in less than five more he was clattering under the archway and off to the nearest bit of open country, to take it out of the mare, who had not done any work for a week,

and was in a humour to take a good deal out of her rider. Edgar this morning felt as if he could conquer the wildest horse that ever was foaled—nay, the Prince of Darkness himself, had he been called upon to wrestle with him under an equine guise.

A hard gallop over a broad expanse of flat common, where the winter rime lay silver-white above the russet sward, quieted horse and rider; and, after a long round by lane and wood, Edgar rode quietly back to Hawksyard between ten and eleven, just in time to find his mother seated at breakfast, and wondering at her own dissipation.

After this unusually late breakfast Mr. Turchill went to look at his horses—a regular thing on a non-hunting morning. "I took it out of the mare," he said, as Black Pearl stood reeking in her box, waiting to cool down before she was groomed.

"Indeed you have, sir," answered his head man—a faithful creature, but not ceremonious with a master he adored. "You don't mean hunting her to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, I did, if the weather allows. Don't you think she'll be fit?"

"I think you've pretty well whacked her out for the next week to come. She won't touch her corn."

"Poor old woman!" said Edgar, going into the box and fondling the beautiful black head. "Did we go too fast, my girl? It was as much your fault as mine, my beauty. I think we were both bewitched; but I must take the nonsense out of you somehow, before you carry a lady."

"You didn't think of putting a lady on that mare, did you, sir?" asked the groom.

"Yes, I do. I think she'd carry a lady beautifully."

"So she would, sir; but she wouldn't carry the same lady twice. There'd be very little left of the lady when she'd done."

"Think so, Jarvey? Then we must find something better for the lady—something as safe as a house, and as handsome as—as paint," concluded Edgar, whose mind was not richly stocked with poetical similes. "If you hear of anything very perfect in the market you can let me know."

"Yes, sir."

It seemed early in the day to think of buying a horse for a wife who was yet to be won; but, encouraged by those few words of Daphne's, Edgar saw all the future in so rosy a light that, this morning, freshened and exhilarated by his long ride, he felt as secure of happiness as if the wedding-bells were ringing their gay joy-peal over the flat green fields and winding waters. He was longing to see Daphne again, to win from her some confirmation of his hope; and now as he moved about the poultry-yard and gardens he was counting the minutes which must pass before he could with decency present himself at South Hill.

It would not do for him to go there before luncheon. Everybody would be tired. Afternoon tea-time would perhaps be the more agreeable hour. It was a period of the day in which women always seemed to him more friendly and amiable than at any other time—content to lay aside the most enthralling book, or the newest passion in fancy-work, and to abandon themselves graciously to the milder pleasures of society.

The afternoon was so fine that he went on foot to pay his visit, glad to get rid of the time between luncheon and five o'clock in a leisurely six-mile walk. It was a delicious walk by meadow, and copse, and river-side, and although Edgar knew every inch of the way, he loved nature in all her moods so well that the varying beauties of a frosty winter afternoon were as welcome to his eye and spirit as the lush loveliness of midsummer; and he was thinking of Daphne all the way, picturing her smile of greeting, feeling the thrilling touch of her hand, warm in his own.

Madoline, or Sir Vernon, would ask him to dinner, no doubt; and then, some time during the evening, he would be able to get Daphne all to himself in the conservatory, on the stairs, in the corridor. His heart and mind were so full of purpose that he felt what he had to say could be said briefly. He would ask her if she had not repented her cruelty that night in the walnut walk; if she had not found out that true love, even from a somewhat inferior kind of person, was worth having —a jewel not to be flung under the feet of swine.

And then, and then, she would lift up those sweet eyes to his face—as she had done last night—and he would clasp her unreproved in his arms, and know himself supremely blest. Life could hold no more delight. Death might come that moment and find him content to die.

It was dusk when he came to South Hill, a frosty twilight, with a crimson glow of sunset low down in the gray sky, and happy robins chirruping in the plantations, where the purple rhododendrons flowered so luxuriously in spring-time, and where scarlet berries of holly and mountain ash enlivened the dull dark greenery of winter. The house on the hill, with its many windows, some shining with firelight from within, others reflecting the ruddier light in the sky, made a pleasant picture after a six-mile tramp through a somewhat lonely landscape. It looked a hospitable house, a house full of happy people, a house where a man might find a temporary haven from the cares of life. To Edgar's eye the firelight shining from within was like a welcome.

"Miss Lawford at home?" he inquired.

"Not at home," answered the footman with a decisive air.

Now there is something much more crushing in the manner of a footman when he tells you that his people are out than in that of the homelier parlour-maid who gives the same information. The girl would fain reconcile you to the blow; she sympathises with you in your disappointment. Perhaps she offers you the somewhat futile consolation implied in the fact that her mistress has only just stepped out, or comforts you with the distant hope that your friend will be home to dinner. She would be glad if she could to lessen your regret. But the well-trained man-servant looks at you with the blank and stony gaze of a blind destiny. His voice is doom. "Not at home," he says curtly; and if, perchance, there be any expression in his face, it will be a veiled scorn, as who should say, "Not at home—to you."

But Edgar was in a mood not to be daunted by the most icy of menials—a Warwickshire bumpkin two years ago, but steeped to the lips in the languid insolence of May Fair to-day.

"Is Miss Daphne Lawford at home?" he asked.

The footman believed, with supreme indifference, as if the presence or absence of a younger daughter who was not an heiress were a question he could hardly stoop to contemplate, that Miss Daphne Lawford might possibly be found upon the premises; and he further condescended to impart the information that Miss Lawford had driven to the Abbey with Mrs. Ferrers and Mr. Goring to see the improvements.

"I'll go and find her for myself," said Edgar, too eager to wait for forms and ceremonies; "I daresay she is in the morning-room."

He passed the servant, and went straight to the pretty room where he had been so much at home for the last ten years. There were no lamps or candles; Daphne was sitting alone in the firelight, in one of those low roomy chairs which modern upholsterers delight in—sitting alone, with neither book nor work, and Fluff, the Maltese terrier, curled up in her lap.

Her eyelids were lowered, and Edgar ap-

proached her softly, thinking she was asleep; but at the sound of his footfall she looked up, gently, gravely, without any surprise at his coming.

"I hope that you are better—quite well, in fact; that you have entirely recovered from your fatigue last night," he began tenderly.

"I am quite well," she answered almost angrily, and blushing crimson with vexation. "Pray don't make a fuss about it. Waltzing so long made me giddy. That was all."

Her snappish tone was a cruel change after her sweetness last night. Edgar's heart sank very low at this unexpected rebuff.

"You are all alone," he said feebly.

"Unless you count Fluff and the squirrel, yes. But they are very good company," answered Daphne, brightening a little, and smiling at him with that provoking kindness, that easy friendliness, which always chilled his soul.

It was so hopelessly unlike the feeling he wished to awaken.

"Madoline drove to the Abbey with Aunt Rhoda and Mr. Goring directly after luncheon. The new

hot-houses are finished, I believe, at last. I have been horribly lazy. I only came down an hour ago."

"I am glad you were able to sleep," said Edgar. "It was more than I could do."

"I suppose nobody ever does sleep much after a ball," answered Daphne. "The music goes on repeating itself over and over again in one's brain, and one goes spinning round in a perpetual imaginary waltz. I was thinking all last night of Don Ramiro and Donna Clara."

"Friends of yours?" inquired Edgar.

Daphne's eyes sparkled at the question, but she did not laugh. She only looked at him with a compassionate smile.

"You have never read Heine?"

"Never. Is it interesting?"

"Heinrich Heine? He was a German poet, don't you know. As great a poet, almost, as Byron."

"Unhappily I don't read German."

"Oh, but some of his poetry has been translated. The translations are not much like the original, but still they are something."

"And who is Don— Ra——what's-his-name?" inquired Edgar, still very much in the dark.

"The hero of a ballad—an awful, ghastly, ghostly ballad, ever so much ghastlier than Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogene, and the worms they crept in, and the worms they crept out, don't you know. He is dead, and she has jilted him and married somebody else; and he has promised her on the eve of her wedding that he will come to the wedding feast: and he comes and waltzes with her, and she doesn't know that he is dead, and she reproaches him for wearing a black cloak at her bridal, and she asks him why his cheeks are snow-white and his hands ice-cold, and they go on whirling round all the time, the trumpets blowing and the drums beating, and to all she says he gives the same answer:

"Said I not that I would come?

That awful ballad was in my mind all night, and when I did at last fall asleep, I dreamt I was at the ball again, and instead of Stratford Town Hall we were in an old Gothic palace at Toledo

and—and—the person I was dancing with was Don Ramiro. His white dead face looked down at me, and all the people vanished, and we were dancing alone in the dark cold hall."

She shuddered at the recollection of her dream, clasping her hands before her face, as if to shut out some hideous sight.

"You ought not to read such poetry," said Edgar, deeply concerned. "How can people let you have such books?"

"Oh, there is no harm in the book. You know I adore poetry. Directly I was able to write a German exercise, I got hold of Heine, and began to spell out his verses. They are so sweet, so mournful, so full of a patient despair."

"You have too much imagination," said Edgar. "You ought to read sober solid prose."

"'Blair's Lectures,' 'Sturm's Reflections,' 'Locke on the Understanding,'" retorted Daphne, laughing. "No; I like books that take me out of myself and into another world."

"But if they only take you into charnel-houses,

among ghosts and dead people, I don't see the advantage of that."

"Don't you? There are times when anything is better than one's own thoughts."

"Why should you shrink from thought?" asked Edgar tenderly. "You can have nothing painful to remember or think about; unless," he added, seeing an opening, "you feel remorseful for having been so cruel to me."

He had drawn his chair close to hers in the firelight—the ruddy, comfortable light which folded them round like a rosy cloud. She sat far back in her downy nest, almost buried in its soft depths, her eyes gazing dreamily at the fire, her sunny hair glittering in the fitful light. If she had been looking him full in the face, in broad day, Edgar Turchill could hardly have been so bold.

"I did feel very sorry, last night, when you were so good to me," she said slowly.

"Good to you! Why, I did nothing!"

"You are so loyal and good. I saw it all last night, as if your heart had suddenly been spread open before me like a book. I think I read you

plainly last night for the first time. You are faithful and true; a gentleman to the core of your heart. All men ought to be like that: but they are not."

"You can have had very little experience of their shortcomings," said Edgar, his heart glowing at her praise. And then, emboldened, and yet full of fear, he hastened to take advantage of her humour. "If you can trust me; if you think me in the slightest measure worthy of these sweet words, which might be a much better man's crown of bliss, why will you not make me completely happy? I love you so truly, so dearly, that, if to have an honest man for your slave can help to make your life pleasant, you had better take me. I know that I am not worthy of you, that you are as high above me in intellect, and grace, and beauty, as the stars are in their mystery and splendour; but a more brilliant man might not be quite so ready to mould himself according to your will, to sink his own identity in yours, to be your very slave, in fact; to have no purpose except to obey you."

"Don't!" cried Daphne. "If you were my husband, I should like you to make me obey. I am not such a fool as to want a slave."

"Let me be your husband; we can settle afterwards who shall obey," pleaded Edgar, leaning with folded arms upon the broad elbow of her chair, trying to get as near her as her entrenched position would allow.

"I like you very much. After Madoline there is no one I like better," faltered Daphne; "but I am not the least little bit in love with you. I suppose it is wrong to be so candid; but I want you to know the truth."

"If you like me well enough to marry me, I am content."

"Really and truly? Content to accept liking instead of love; confidence and frank straightforward friendship instead of sentiment or romance?"

"I do not care a straw for romance. And to be liked and trusted——well, that is something. So long as there is no one else you have ever liked better——"

The face turned towards the fire quivered with

the passing of a strong emotion, but Edgar could only see the thick ripples of golden hair making a wavy line above the delicate ear, and the perfect outline of the throat, rising out of its soft lace ruffle like the stem of a lily from among its leaves.

"Who else is there for me to like?" she asked with a faint laugh.

"Then, dearest, I would rather have your liking than any other woman's love: and it shall go hard with me if liking do not grow to love before our lives are ended," said Edgar, clasping the hand that lay inert upon Fluff's silky back.

The Maltese resented the liberty by an ineffectual snap.

"Please, don't—don't think it quite settled yet," cried Daphne, scared by this hand-clasp, which seemed like taking possession of her. "You must give me time to breathe—time to think. I want to be worthy of you, if I can—if—if—I am ever to be your wife. I want to be loyal—and honest—as you are."

"Only say that you will be my wife. I can trust you with the rest of my fate."

"Give me a few days—a few hours, at least —to consider."

"But why not to-day? Let it be to-day," he pleaded passionately.

"You must give me a little while," answered Daphne, smiling faintly at his impatience, which seemed to her something childish, she not being touched by the same passion, or inspired by the same hope, being, as it were, outside the circle of his thoughts. "If—if—you are very anxious to be answered—let it be to-day."

"Bless you, darling!"

"But don't be grateful in advance. The answer may be No."

"It must not. You would not break my heart a second time."

"Ah, then you contrived to mend it after the first breakage," retorted Daphne, laughing with something of her old mirth. "Madoline broke it first, and you patched it together and made quite a good job of it, and then offered it to me. Well, if you really wish it, you shall have your answer to-night. I must speak to Lina first."

"I know she will be on my side."

"Tremendously. You will dine here, of course. And I suppose you will go away at about eleven o'clock. You know the window of my room?"

"Know it!" cried Edgar, who had lingered to gaze at that particular casement under every condition of sky and temperature. "Know it? Did Romeo know Juliet's balcony?"

"Well, then, at ten minutes past eleven look up at my window. If the answer be No, the shutters will be shut, and all dark; if the answer be Yes, the lamp shall be in the window."

"Oh, blessed light. I know the lamp will be there."

"And now no more of this nonsense," said Daphne imperatively. "I am going to give you some tea."

"Put a dose of poison in it, and finish me off straight, if the lamp is not going to shine in your window."

"Absurd man! Do you suppose I know any more than you what the answer is to be? We are the sport of Fate."

The door was opened gently, as if it had been the entrance to a sick man's chamber, and the well-drilled footman brought in a little folding table, and then a tea-tray, an intensely new-fashioned old-fashioned oval oaken tray, with a silver railing, and oriental cups and saucers *à la Belinda* — everything strictly of the hoop-and-patch period. These frivolities of tray and tea-things were one of Mr. Goring's latest gifts to his mistress.

Not another tender word would Daphne allow from her lover. She talked of the people at the hall, asked for details about everybody—the girl in the pink frock; the matron with hardly any frock at all; the hunting men and squires of high degree. She kept Edgar so fully employed answering her questions that he had no time to edge in an amorous speech, though his whole being was breathing love.

Madoline and Gerald Goring came in and found them *tête-à-tête* by the fire. They had made a *détour* on their way home, and had deposited Mrs. Ferrers at the Rectory. It was the

first time Gerald had seen Daphne since the ball.

"Better?" he inquired, with a friendly nod.

"Quite well, thanks. I have not been ill," she answered curtly.

Mr. Goring seated himself in a shadowy corner, remote from the little group by the tea-table.

"Shall I ring for more tea, or have you had some at the Abbey?" asked Daphne, with a businesslike air.

"We had tea in Lady Geraldine's room," answered Madoline. "I wish you had been with us, Daphne. It is such a lovely room in the firelight. The houses are all finished, and Cormack has filled three of them already. Such lovely flowers! I can't imagine where he has found them."

"Easy to do that kind of thing when one has a floating balance of fifty thousand or so at one's bankers," answered Edgar cheerily. "My wife will have to put up with a few old orange-trees that have been at Hawksyard for a century."

The tone in which he uttered those two words

"my wife," startled Gerald out of his reverie. There was a world of suppressed delight and triumph in the utterance.

"He has been asking her to marry him, and she has relented, and accepted him," he thought, hardly knowing whether to be glad or angry.

Was it not ever so much better that she should reward this faithful fellow's devotion, and marry, and be happy in the beaten track of life? He had told himself once that she was a creature just a little too bright and lovely for treading beaten tracks, a girl who ought to be the heroine of some romantic history. Yet, are these heroines of romance the happiest among women? Was the young woman who was sewn up in a sack and drowned in the Bosphorus happy, though her fate inspired one of the finest poems that ever was written? Was Sappho particularly blest, or Hero, Heloise, or Juliet? Their fame was the fruit of exceptional disaster, and not of exceptional joy. The Greek was wise who said that the happiest she is the woman who has no history.

Sir Vernon Lawford came in while they were

all talking of the hot-houses, and asked for a cup of tea, an unusual condescension on his part, and which fluttered Daphne a little as she rang the bell for a fresh teapot.

"Don't trouble yourself, my dear. Give me anything you have there," he said, more kindly than he was wont to speak. "So you were too tired to show at luncheon. Your aunt says you danced too much."

"It was her first ball," pleaded Madoline.

"Yes; the first, but not likely to be the last. She is launched now, and will have plenty of invitations. A foolish friend of mine told me that Daphne was the belle of the ball."

"She was," said Edgar sturdily. "I saw two old women standing on a rout-seat to look at her."

"Is that conclusive?" asked Sir Vernon good-humouredly, and with a shrewd glance from Edgar to his fair-haired daughter.

"I think people must have been demented if they wasted a look upon me while Lina was in the room," said Daphne.

"Oh, but everyone knows Lina," answered her father, pleased at this homage to his beloved elder daughter. "You are a novelty."

He was proud of her success, in spite of himself; proud that she should have burst upon his Warwickshire friends like a revelation of hitherto unknown beauty—unknown, at least, since his second wife, in all the witchery of her charms, had turned the heads of the county twenty years ago. That beauty had been a fatal dower—fatal to her, fatal to him—and he had often told himself that Daphne's prettiness was a perilous thing; to be looked at with the eye of fear and suspicion rather than that of love. And yet he was pleased at her triumph, and inclined to be kinder to her on account thereof.

They seemed a happy family-party at dinner that day. Madoline was full of delight in the improvement of her future home—full of gratitude to her betrothed for the largeness with which he had anticipated her wishes. Edgar was in high spirits; Daphne all gaiety; Sir Vernon unusually open in speech and manner. If Gerald

was more silent than the others, nobody noticed his reserve. He had been quiet all day, and when Madoline had questioned him as to the cause, had owned to not being particularly well.

Later in the evening they all adjourned to the billiard-room, with the exception of Daphne, who pleaded a headache, and bade everyone good-night; but about an hour afterwards, upon the stroke of eleven, Madoline, who had just gone up to her room, was startled by a knock at her door, and then by the apparition of Daphne in her long white dressing-gown.

"My pet, I thought you went to bed an hour ago."

"No, dear. I had a headache, but I was not sleepy."

"My poor darling; you are so pale and heavy-eyed. Come to the fire."

Madoline wanted to instal her in one of the cosy armchairs by the hearth, but Daphne slipped to her favourite seat on the fleecy white rug at her sister's feet.

"No, dear; like this," she said, looking up

at Madoline with tearful eyes; "at your feet—always at your feet; so much lower than you in all things—so little worthy of your love."

"Daphne, it offends me to hear you talk like that. You are all that is sweet and dear. You and I are equal in all things, except fortune: and it shall not be my fault if we are not made equal in that."

"Fortune!" echoed Daphne drearily. "Oh, if you but knew how little I value that. It is your goodness I revere—your purity, your——"

She burst into tears and sobbed passionately, with her face hidden on her sister's knee.

"Daphne, what has happened—what has grieved you so? Tell me, darling; trust me."

"It is nothing; mere foolishness of mine."

"You have something to tell me, I know."

"Yes," answered Daphne, drying her tears hastily and looking up with a grave set face. "I have come to ask your advice. I mean to abide by your decision, whichever way it may fall. Edgar wants me to marry him, and I have promised him an answer to-night. Shall it be 'Yes' or 'No?'"

"Yes, of course, my pet, if you love him."

"But I don't; not the least atom. I have told him so in the very plainest, straightest words I could find. But he still wishes me to be Mrs. Turchill; and he seems to think that when I have been married to him twenty years or so I shall get really attached to him—as Mrs. John Anderson, my Jo, did, don't you know? She may have cared very little for Mr. Anderson at the outset."

"Oh, Daphne," sighed Madoline, with a distressed look, "this is very puzzling. I don't know what to say. I like Edgar so much—I value him so highly—and I should dearly like you to marry him."

"You would!" cried Daphne decisively. "Then that settles it. I shall marry him."

"But you don't care for him."

"I care for you. I would do anything in this world—yes," with sudden energy, "the most difficult thing, were it at the cost of my life—to make you happy. Would it make you happy for me to marry Edgar?"

"I believe it would."

"Then I'll do it. Hark! there's the outer door shutting," cried Daphne, as the hall-door closed with a hollow reverberation. "Edgar will be under my window in a minute or two. I'll run and give him my answer."

"What do you mean?"

"A lamp in my window is to signify Yes."

"Go and put the lamp there, darling. May it be a star for you both, shining upon the beginning of a bright, happy life!"

A few minutes later Edgar, standing in the shrubbery walk, with his eyes fixed on Daphne's casement, the owner of them unconscious of winter's cold, saw the bright spot of light stream out upon the darkness, and knew that he was to be blest. He went home like a man in a happy dream, scarce knowing by what paths he went; and it is a mercy he did not walk into the Avon and incontinently drown himself.

CHAPTER XII.

"FOR I WOL GLADLY YELDEN HIRE MY PLACE."

EDGAR TURCHILL rode over to South Hill directly after breakfast next morning. It was a hunting-day, and the meet was at a favourite spot; but he had business to do which could brook no delay, and even the delight of skimming across the Vale of the Red Horse, on a hunter well able to carry him, must give way to the more vital matter which called him to the house on the hill. So soon as Sir Vernon Lawford might be fairly supposed to be accessible to a visitor, Mr. Turchill presented himself, and asked for an interview.

He was ushered straight to Sir Vernon's study, that sacred, and in a manner official chamber,

which he had ever held in awe; a room in which the driest possible books, in the richest possible bindings, repelled the inquiring mind of an ordinary student, who, looking for Waverley, found himself confronted with Blackstone, or exploring for Byron, found himself face to face with Coke or Chitty.

Here, Sir Vernon, seated reposefully in his great red morocco armchair, listened courteously to Edgar's relation of his love, and his hope that, subject to parental approval, his constancy might speedily be rewarded.

"I have heard something of this before," said Sir Vernon. "My sister told me you had proposed to Daphne, and had been rejected. I was sorry the child had not better taste; for I like you very much, Turchill, as I believe you know."

"You have been very good to me," answered Edgar, reddening with the honest warmth of his feelings. "South Hill has been my second home. The happiest hours of my life have been spent here. Yes, Sir Vernon, Daphne certainly did refuse me in the summer; but I felt that it was

my own fault. I spoke too soon. I ought to have bided my time. And last night, after the ball, I spoke again, and——"

"With a happier result," said Sir Vernon. "But Daphne is little more than a child—no wiser than a child in her whims and fancies. I should not like a straightforward fellow like you to suffer from a schoolgirl's frivolity. Do you think she knows her own mind now any better than she did in the summer, when she gave you quite a different answer? Are you sure that she is in earnest—that she is as fond of you as you are of her?"

"I have no hope of that," answered Edgar, a little despondently. "I have been loving her ever since she came home, and my love has grown stronger with every day of my life. If she likes me well enough to marry me, I am content."

Sir Vernon remained silent for some moments, gravely contemplating the fire, as if he were reading somebody's history in it, and that a gloomy one.

"I am fond enough of you to be sorry you

should marry on such conditions," he answered, after a longish pause. "My younger daughter is a very pretty girl—people persecuted me with compliments about her the other night—and, I suppose, a very fascinating girl; but if she does not honestly and sincerely return your love, I say, Do not marry her. Pluck her out of your heart, Edgar, as you would a poisonous weed. Be sure, if you don't, the poison will rankle there by-and-by, and develop its venom at the time you are least prepared for it."

Edgar, secure in his assurance of future happiness—for what man, having won Daphne, could fail to be happy?—smiled at the unwonted energy of Sir Vernon's address.

"My dear sir, you take this matter too seriously," he replied. "I have no fear of the issue. Daphne's heart is free, and it will be very hard if I cannot make myself owner of it, loving her as I do, and having her promise to marry me. I only want to be assured of your approval."

"That you have with all heartiness, my dear

boy. But I should like to be sure that Daphne is worthy of you."

"Worthy of me!" echoed Edgar, with a tender smile; "I wish to Heaven I were worthy of her."

"She is very young," said Sir Vernon thoughtfully.

"Nineteen on her next birthday."

"But that birthday is nearly a year off. I hope you will not be in a hurry to be married."

"I shall defer that to your judgment; though I think, as I can never feel warmly interested in Hawksyard till I have a wife there, the sooner we are married, so far as my happiness is concerned, the better."

"Of course. You young men have always some all-sufficient reason for being over the border with the lady. How will your mother relish the change?"

Poor Edgar winced at the question, feeling very sure that Mrs. Turchill would take the event as her death-blow.

"My mother is perfectly independent," he faltered. "She has her jointure."

"Has she not Hawksyard for her life?"

"No; the estate was strictly entailed. I am sole master there."

"I am glad of that," said Sir Vernon. "It is an interesting old place."

"Daphne likes it," murmured Edgar fatuously.

"I suppose you know that I can give my younger daughter no fortune?"

"If you could give her a million, it would not make me one whit better pleased at winning her."

"I believe you, Edgar," answered Sir Vernon. "When a man of your mould is in love, filthy lucre has very little weight with him. There will be a residue, I have no doubt, when I am gone —a few thousands; but the bulk of my property was settled when I married Lina's mother. I suppose you know that Lina is very pleased at the idea of having you for a brother-in-law?"

"I know nothing, except that Daphne has consented to be my wife."

"Lina announced the fact to me this morning at breakfast. Daphne was not down—a headache—a little natural shyness, I daresay. Lina is very glad—very much your friend."

"She has always been that," faltered Edgar, looking back with half-incredulous wonder to the time when a word from Lina had been enough to stir the pulses of his heart, when the mention of her name was music.

"I think I cannot do better for you than leave your happiness in Lina's care," said Sir Vernon. "Daphne will not be married first, of course."

"Might they not be married on the same day?" suggested Edgar. "Lina is to be married directly she comes of age, is she not?"

"That has been proposed," said Sir Vernon reluctantly, "but I am in no hurry to lose my daughter, and I don't think Lina is eager to leave me. In my precarious state of health it will be hard for me to bear the pain of parting."

"But, my dear Sir Vernon, she will be so near you—quite close at hand," remonstrated Edgar,

inwardly revolting against this selfishness, which would delay his own happiness as well as Goring's.

"Don't talk about it, Turchill," exclaimed Sir Vernon testily. "You don't understand — you can't enter into my feelings. My daughter is all the world to me now. What will she be when she is a wife, a mother, with a hundred different interests and anxieties plucking at her heart-strings? Why, I daresay a teething-baby would be more to her than her father, if I were on my death-bed."

"Indeed, Sir Vernon, you wrong her."

"I daresay I do. But I am devoured with jealousy when I think of her belonging to anyone else. It is the penalty she pays for having been perfect as a daughter. Our virtues, as well as our vices, are often scourges for our own backs. However, when the time comes I must bear the blow with a smiling countenance, that she may never know how hard I am hit. Only you can imagine I don't want to hasten the evil hour. And now, as I think we understand each other, you may be off to pleasanter society than mine."

Edgar instantly availed himself of this permission, and hastened to the morning-room, where Madoline was seated at her work-table, while Daphne twisted herself round and round on the music-stool, now talking to her sister, now playing a few bars of one of Schumann's "*Kinderstücken*," anon picking out a popular melody she had heard the faithful Bink whistle as he weeded his flower-beds.

She started a little at Edgar's entrance, and "blushed celestial red, love's proper hue," much to the delight of her lover, who hung out a rosy flag on his own side, and looked as shy as any school-girl.

He shook hands with Madoline, and then went straight to the piano, and tried by a tender pressure of Daphne's hand to express something of the rapture that was flooding his soul.

"I have seen your father, dearest," he said in her ear, as she went on lightly playing little bits of Schumann. "He thoroughly approves—he is glad."

"Then I am glad if he is glad, and you are glad, and Madoline is glad," answered Daphne, with a smile in which there was a subtle mockery that escaped Edgar's perception. "What can I do better than please everybody?"

"You have made me the happiest man in creation."

"Does not every young man say that when he is engaged?" asked Daphne laughingly. "I believe it is a formula. And when he has been married a year the happiest man in creation takes to quarrelling with his wife. However, I hope we may not quarrel. I will try to be as good to you as you have been to me; and that is saying a good deal."

They lingered by the piano, Edgar pouring forth vague expressions of his delight, his gratitude, his intoxication of bliss. Daphne playing a little, and listening a little, with her eyes always on the keys, offering her lover only the lashes, dark brown with sparks of gold upon their tips, for his contemplation. But such lashes, and such eye-

lids, and such a lovely droop of the small classic head, were enough to satisfy a lover's eye for longer than Edgar was required to look at them.

By-and-by, when he had exhausted a lover's capacity for talking nonsense, he made a sudden dash at the practical.

"I want you to come and see my mother, Daphne."

"Have you told her?"

"No, not yet. There has been no opportunity, you know."

This was hardly true, since, seated opposite Mrs. Turchill at the breakfast-table that morning, Edgar had vainly endeavoured to frame the sentence which should announce his bliss, and had found an awkwardness in the revelation which required to be surmounted at more leisure.

"I am going to tell her directly I go home. It was better to see Sir Vernon first, don't you know. And I want you and Madoline to come over to tea this afternoon. You could drive over to Hawksyard with Daphne after luncheon, couldn't you, Madoline?" he asked, going over to the

work-table. "It would be so good of you, and would please my mother so very much."

"Would it?" asked Lina, smiling up at him. "Then it shall be done."

The young man lingered as long as he could, consistently with his performance of that duty which he felt must not be deferred beyond luncheon time. It was hardly a good time to choose for the revelation, for Mrs. Turchill was apt to be somewhat disturbed in her temper at the mid-day meal; her patience having been exercised by sundry defalcations discovered in her morning round of the house. It might be that new milk had been given away to unauthorised recipients, or to pensioners who were only entitled to receive skimmed milk; it might be an unexplainable evanishment of home-brewed beer; or that the principal oak staircase was not so slippery as it ought to be; or that the famous pewter dinner-service was tarnished; or a favourite fender displayed spots of rust; but there was generally something, some feather-weight of domestic care which disturbed the even balance of Mrs. Turchill's mind at this hour. Like those

modern scales which can be turned by an infinitesimal portion of a human hair, so the fine balance of Mrs. Turchill's temper required but very little to alter it.

Edgar rode home to Hawksyard in the clear bright winter noontide, feeling as much like a convicted criminal as a young man of pure mind and clear conscience well could feel. He went bustling into the dining-room, rubbing his hands, and making a great pretence of cheeriness. His mother was standing on the hearth-rug knitting a useful brown winter sock—for him, he knew. Those active knitting-needles of hers were always at work for him. He felt himself an ingrate, as he thought of her labour.

"Well, mother; lovely weather, isn't it, so wintry and seasonable? I hope you have had a pleasant morning."

"About as pleasant as I can have in a nest of vipers," answered Mrs. Turchill, frowning at her work, and intent upon turning a heel.

"What's up now?" asked Edgar, nothing startled by the vigour of her speech.

"The beer consumed at Christmas—I won't say drunk, for gallons of it must have been given away —is something too dreadful to contemplate," replied Mrs. Turchill.

"Never mind the beer, mother," answered Edgar, still rubbing his hands before the fire, and shifting from one foot to another in a manner that indicated a certain perturbation of spirit; "Christmas comes only once a year, you know, and the servants ought to enjoy themselves."

"That's all very well, Edgar, within proper limits; but when I see them stepping over the boundary line——"

"You feel that it's time to put on the drag," interjected Edgar. "Of course; very right and proper. Whatever should I do without such a dear prudent mother to look after things?"

And then, suddenly remembering that the most eager desire of his heart at this very moment was to substitute a foolish young wife for this wise and experienced housekeeper, Edgar Turchill became suddenly as vermilion as the most vivid cock's-comb in his mother's poultry-yard. He felt that

the revelation he had to make must be blurted out somehow. There was no use in prancing before the fire, making such a serious business of warming his hands.

"I've been over to South Hill this morning, mother," he said at last, rather jerkily.

"Have you?" said Mrs. Turchill curtly. "It seems to me you never go anywhere else."

"Well, I'm afraid that's a true bill," he answered, laughing with affected heartiness, very much as the timorous traveller whistles in a lonely wood. "I love the place, and the people who live in it. South Hill has been my second home ever since I was a little bit of a chap at Rugby. But this morning I have been there on very particular business. I have been having a serious talk with Sir Vernon. I wonder if you could guess the subject of our conversation, mother, and spare my blushes in telling it."

It was Mrs. Turchill's turn to assume the cock's-comb's flaming hue.

"If you have done anything to blush for, Edgar, I am sorry for you," she observed sternly.

"Your father was one of the most respectable men in Warwickshire, and the most looked-up to, or my father would not have allowed me to marry him."

"You are taking me a trifle too literally, mother," answered Edgar, laughing uneasily. "I hope there is nothing disreputable in a man of my age falling in love and wanting to be married. That's the only crime I have to confess this morning. Yesterday afternoon I asked Daphne to be my wife, and she consented; and this morning I settled it all with Sir Vernon. We are to be married on the same day as Goring and Madoline —at least, Sir Vernon said something to that effect."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Turchill freezingly. "Indeed! And now Miss Daphne has consented, and Sir Vernon has consented, and the very wedding-day is fixed, you do me the honour to inform me. I thank you from my heart, Edgar, for the respect and affection, the consideration and regard, you have shown for me in this matter. I am not likely to forget your conduct."

"Dearest mother," gasped Edgar affrightedly,

for the icy indignation of his parent's speech and manner went beyond the worst he had feared, "surely you are not offended—surely——"

"But it is only what I might reasonably have expected," pursued Mrs. Turchill, ignoring the interruption. "It is only what I ought to have looked for. When a mother devotes herself day and night to her son; when she studies his welfare and his comfort in everything; when she sits up with him night after night through the measles—quite unnecessarily, as the doctor said at the time—and reduces herself to a shadow when he has the scarlatina; when she worries herself about him every time he gets damp feet, and endures agony every hour of the day while he is out shooting; this is pretty sure to be the result. He is caught by the first pretty face he sees, and his mother becomes a cipher in his estimation."

"Believe me that is not my case, dear mother," protested Edgar, putting his arm round the matron's waist, which she made as inflexible as she possibly could for the occasion, and trying to kiss her, which she would not allow. "You will never cease

to be valued and dear. Do you suppose there is no room in my heart for you and Daphne? I know she is a mere child, a positive baby, to place at the head of a house which you have managed so cleverly all these years; but everything in this life must have a beginning, don't you know, and I rely upon you for teaching Daphne how to manage her house."

"That kind of thing cannot be taught, Edgar," answered his mother severely. "It must be the gradual growth of years in an adaptable mind. I don't believe Daphne Lawford will ever be a housekeeper. It is not in her. You might as well expect a butterfly to sit upon its eggs with the patience of a farm-yard hen. However," sighed Mrs. Turchill, "you have chosen for yourself."

"Did you suppose I should let anyone else choose for me in such a matter, mother?"

"I am sorry for my lovely stock of house-linen. The tea-cloths will get used in the stable; and the kitchen-cloths will be made away with by wholesale."

"Never mind a few tea-cloths, mother."

"But it is not a few, it is a great many. I daresay that out of the twelve dozen that are now in the linen-closet you won't have two dozen sound ones a twelvemonth after your marriage."

"I think I could survive even that loss, mother, if you were happy," answered Edgar lightly.

"How could I possibly be happy knowing the waste and destruction of things that I have taken so much trouble to get together? I'm sure I feel positively ill at the idea of the best glass and china under the authority of a girl of eighteen; your great-grandmother's Crown Derby dessert-set, which I have often been told is priceless."

"Yes, mother, by people who don't want to buy it. If you wanted to sell it, you would hear a very different story. However, I don't see any reason why Daphne should not be able to take care of the dessert-plates——"

"I have always kept chamois-leather over each plate," interrupted Mrs. Turchill, with a pensive shake of her head. "Will she take as much trouble?"

"Or why there should be waste and destruction

anywhere. Daphne will not be the first young wife who ever had to take care of a house, and I know by the way she learnt to row how easy it is to teach her anything."

"Easy to teach her to row, or to ride, or to play lawn-tennis, or to do anything frivolous and useless, I have no doubt," retorted his mother; "but I don't believe it is in her to learn careful ways, and the management of servants. I only hope the waste and destruction will stop at the house-linen. I only hope she won't bring ruin upon you; but when I think how many a young man of good means has been utterly ruined by an extravagant wife——"

"Upon my word, mother," protested Edgar, with a dash of resentment, feeling that this was too much, "you are making a perfect raven of yourself, instead of being cheery and pleasant, as I expected you to be. I'm sorry I have not been able to choose a wife more to your liking as a daughter-in-law; but marriage is one of the few circumstances of life in which selfishness is a duty, and a man must please himself at any hazard of

displeasing other people. I don't believe there's a man who was at the Hunt Ball the other night who won't envy me my good luck."

"Very likely; since men are influenced by mere outside prettiness," said Mrs. Turchill. "Though even there Daphne is by no means faultless. Her nose is too short."

"Now, mother, you have been so good to me all my life that it would be a very unnatural thing if you were to begin to be unkind all at once, and in a crisis of my life in which I most need your love," pleaded Edgar with genuine feeling.

He put his arm round his mother's waist, which, this time, was less inflexible than before. He turned the matron's face towards his, and, lo! her eyes were full of tears.

"It would be very strange, indeed, if I could deny you anything," she said, strangling a sob. "There never was a child so much indulged as you were. If you had cried for the moon, it would have quite worried me that I wasn't able to get it for you."

"And you would have given me a stable-lantern

instead," answered Edgar, smiling. "Yes, best of mothers, you have always been indulgent, and you are going to be indulgent now, and you will take Daphne to your heart of hearts, and be as fond of her as if she were that baby-girl you lost, grown up to womanhood."

"Don't, Edgar, don't!" cried Mrs. Turchill, fairly overcome. "Her bassinet is in the little oak room. I was looking at it yesterday. I have never got over that loss."

"You will think she has come back to you some day, when you have a little granddaughter," said Edgar tenderly.

His mother, once reduced to the pathetic mood, was perfectly tractable. Edgar petted and soothed her; protested somewhat recklessly that the chief desire of Daphne's life was to gain her affection; announced the intended afternoon visit; and obtained his mother's promise of a gracious reception.

When Miss Lawford and her sister arrived at about half-past four the drawing-room wore a hospitable aspect; a huge log burning in the

Elizabethan fire-place; flowers of a homely kind —chrysanthemums and Christmas roses, crocuses and snowdrops—about the rooms; and an old-fashioned silver tea-tray on an old-fashioned sofa-table, nothing of Adam or Chippendale or Queen Anne about it, but a good old ponderous piece of rosewood furniture, almost as heavy as a house.

Mrs. Turchill received her guests with gracious smiles and with a heartiness which took Daphne by surprise. She had made up her mind that she was going to be snubbed, and a dash of timidity gave a new grace to her beauty. She was very grave, and seemed, to Mrs. Turchill's scrutinising eye, to be fully awakened to the responsibilities of her position. Could she but remain in this better frame of mind she might fairly be trusted with the Derby dessert-service and the piled-up treasures of the linen-closet.

Mrs. Turchill made Daphne sit on the sofa by her side while she poured out the tea, and was positively affectionate in her manner.

"You will be making tea in this pot before long," she said, with a loving glance at the fluted

teapot. "It is not a good pourer. You'll have to learn the knack of holding it exactly in the right position."

"I hope you are not sorry," faltered Daphne in a very low voice, meaning about the event generally, not with any special reference to the teapot.

"Well, my dear, I am too truthful a woman to deny that it was a blow," returned Mrs. Turchill candidly. Edgar had kept out of the way when the sisters arrived, wishing his mother to have Daphne all to herself for a little while. "I suppose that kind of thing must always be a blow to a mother. 'My son's my son till he gets him a wife,' you know."

"I hope Edgar will never be any less your son than he is at this moment," said Daphne. "I should not like him so well as I do if I thought his regard for me could make him one shade less devoted to you."

"Well, my dear, time will show," replied Mrs. Turchill doubtfully. "As a rule young wives are very selfish; they expect to monopolise their

husbands' affection. All I hope is that you love Edgar as he deserves to be loved. There never was a worthier young man, and no girl living could hope for a better husband than he will make."

To this exhortation Daphne replied nothing. She sat with downcast eyes, stirring her tea; and Mrs. Turchill, taking this silence for maidenly reserve, transferred her attentions to Madoline.

"I am so sorry Mr. Goring did not drive over with you," she said. "I quite expected him."

"You are very kind," answered Lina. "He has gone to London. I had a telegram from Euston Station an hour ago. Gerald has some business to settle with his London lawyers, and is likely to be away for some days."

"I'm afraid you must find South Hill very dull in his absence," suggested Mrs. Turchill politely.

"I miss him very much; but I don't think I am very dull. My father occupies a good deal of my time; and then there is Daphne, who has generally plenty to say for herself."

"Meaning that I am an insatiable chatterer," said Daphne, laughing. "I'm afraid it was Dibb —I mean Martha, an old schoolfellow of mine— who got me into the habit of talking so much."

"Was she a great talker?"

"Quite the contrary. She rarely opened her mouth except to put something into it, so I acquired the pernicious habit of talking for two."

Edgar now came in, and seeing Daphne and his mother seated side by side upon the sofa, felt himself exalted to the seventh heaven of tranquil joy. This and this only was needed to fill his cup of bliss: that his mother should be content, that life should flow on smoothly in the old grooves.

"Well, Daphne, how do you like the look of Hawksyard in the winter?"

"I think it is quite the nicest old place in the world. I haven't seen much of the world; but I can't imagine a more interesting old house."

"You will like it better and better as you become acquainted with it," said Mrs. Turchill. "It is one of the most convenient houses I ever saw, and I have seen a good many in my time.

My husband's mother was a capital housekeeper, and she did not rest till she had made the domestic arrangements as near perfection as was possible in her time. I have tried to follow in her footsteps."

"And to make perfection still more perfect," said Edgar.

"There are modern inventions and improvements, Edgar, which your grandmother knew nothing about. Not that I hold with them all. If you are not tied for time," added Mrs. Turchill, addressing herself to the two young ladies, "I should very much like to show Daphne the domestic offices. It would give her an idea of what she will have to deal with by-and-by."

Daphne, who knew about as much as a butterfly knows of the management of a house, smiled faintly but said nothing. She had come to Hawksyard determined to make herself pleasing to Mrs. Turchill, if it were possible, for Edgar's sake.

"I ventured to tell them to take out the horses," said Edgar, "knowing that you don't dine till eight."

"I shall be pleased to stay as long as Mrs.

Turchill likes," answered Madoline; whereupon the matron, acknowledging this speech with a gracious bend, rose from her sofa, took her key-basket from the table, and led the way to the corridor in which opened those china and linen stores which were the supreme delight of her soul.

Swelling with pride and the consciousness of duty done, she displayed and descanted on her treasures and the convenient arrangement thereof; the old diamond-cut glass; the Bow, the Staffordshire, the Swansea, the Derby cups and saucers, and plates and dishes—crockery bought in the common way of life, and now of inestimable value. She showed her goodly piles of linen and damask, which a Flemish housewife might have envied. She led her guests to the dairy, which in its smaller and humbler way was as neat and dainty and ornamental as Her Majesty's dairy at Frogmore. She talked learnedly of butter-making, cream-cheeses, and the disposal of skim-milk. Daphne wondered to find how large a science was this domestic management of which she knew absolutely nothing.

"A house of this kind requires a great deal of care and a great deal of thought," said Mrs. Turchill with a solemn air. "Old servants are a great comfort, but they have their drawbacks, and require to be kept in check. With a young, inexperienced mistress I'm afraid they will be tempted to take many liberties."

Mrs. Turchill concluded her speech with a gentle sigh, and a regretful glance at Daphne—not an unfriendly look, by any means; but it expressed her foreboding of future ruin for the house of Hawksyard.

END OF VOL. II.

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